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# Divine Names of Arunachala

18. ॐ साक्षिणे नमः

om sākṣiṇe namaḥ

Prostration to Him who is the witness of everything.

‘Sākṣiṇe’ is the word ‘sākṣin’ in the dative case. ‘Sakṣin’ comes from ‘sa’ meaning ‘with’ plus ‘akṣi’, meaning ‘eye’, so ‘a witness’. It is defined in the *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* as Śiva.

*In the three states of consciousness whatever appears as the object of enjoyment or the enjoyer or the enjoyment, I am different from them, the witness, pure consciousness, the eternal Śiva. (I.18)*

In an elevating conversation with a sincere devotee, Bhagavan makes it clear that the witness here is unlike or beyond the *jīva* in a state of ordinary consciousness.

*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.<sup>1</sup>*

The *jñānī* is a witness, as described by Bhagavan.

*For a realised being the Self alone is the Reality, and actions are only phenomenal, not affecting the Self. Even when he acts he has no sense of being an agent. His actions are only involuntary and he remains a witness to them without any attachment.<sup>2</sup>*

You also are a witness, and Bhagavan exhorts us to be just that. This is stated beautifully in a verse from the *Aṣṭavakra Gītā*.

*You are not the body, nor is the body yours, nor are you the doer or the enjoyer. You are Intelligence itself, the eternal witness and you are free. Get along happily.<sup>3</sup>*

— BKC

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 18-7-46.

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§17.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 15, verse 4.

# Who is a Genuine Guru?

Today there is not so much a dearth of gurus as a plethora, all claiming that they will help you resolve whatever problem you may have usually at a fee commensurate with their efforts and expertise. If that is the case and many of these so called experts do indeed command some degree of expertise, why then do we come to a guru who apparently cannot be seen or spoken to in the normal course of events? It does seem odd from the conventional point of view.

However, this is to miss the point because although it appears that we choose to come to Arunachala or to choose Bhagavan Ramana as our guru, this is not necessarily true.

Much more likely it is Bhagavan who selects us. We are attracted to Arunachala or to the photograph of Bhagavan or words that he may have said or written, but ultimately the power which attracts us is not ours to decide. For who are we with our limited understanding to comprehend the great forces at work in this world that we inhabit? Who are we to appoint Bhagavan as *our* guru? Bhagavan is not a commodity you can decide to either buy or not according to your special status. He is not for sale on a whim as if we are doing him a favour.

On the contrary, Bhagavan is a fire and all who come near with a genuine desire for enlightenment will be burnt clean of their predispositions, vanities and ignorance.

It comes as a shock to realise that we are helpless and like Isaac Newton, we too stand on the beach of the universe with our small bucket and erroneously think we can fill it with the measureless waters of reality.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, any meaningful contact with Bhagavan will quickly dissuade us from maintaining our misinformed sense of our own worth.

This is what a true guru does: destroys our illusions about who we think we are. It is a painful process and unless we are ready and strong, we will balk at the prospect. Anyone with a 'healthy' or self-satisfied ego would run at the prospect. But those who realise there is much more than the apparent physical reality in life, will heed the call.

Bhagavan is always calling, for that is the nature of his being. Like a powerful light, his beam is constantly, impersonally searching the outer darkness for those who are ready to feel and be attracted by his magnetism. Bhagavan is a manifestation of that mighty power Arunachala, which is not just the obvious pile of inert, sun-blasted rocks, but the masked, invisible, living manifestation of the divine entity that observes our childish ways and whose mystery is beyond our superficial comprehension. We as humans have been in awe of Arunachala for millennia. To some people who come here the hill speaks instantly and irrevocably, they find it hard to tear themselves away. To others it is never more than a pile of rocks. We have some glimpses in recorded history that tells us of its antiquity.

Tirujnana Sambandar, a 7th century Tamil Saivite saint-poet, revered Arunachaleswara in the collection of verses included in the Tevaram, a 7th century Tamil Saiva work. Manikkavacakar, the great 9th Century Tamil saint came to Arunachala on his pilgrimage around Tamil Nadu and composed a famous song *Tiruvempāvai* celebrating the devotion of those who lived at its base. It is clear from

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<sup>1</sup> There is a famous quote attributed to Isaac Newton. "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

his poetic outpouring that the mystery and fame of Arunachala was well established. How long we do not know but certainly for an aeon.

Though apparently Bhagavan Ramana came out of nowhere and brought to the attention of the world the glory of Arunachala, if we look more closely we see that he is firmly in the rich Tamil tradition of the Saivite *nayanars* ('hounds of Siva') and his purpose in this life was to revivify the *sanatana dharma*. He made it relevant to our modern age with all its challenges. In doing so he revealed by his profound devotion and love of Arunachala the easy availability of this mysterious storehouse of living knowledge.

Returning to the title of this editorial 'Who is a Genuine Guru?' we can say that all who guide us to a higher truth are valid gurus but that does not mean the relationship is absolute. Like all relationships they dissolve after serving their purpose. Even a so-called guru whose knowledge is limited or whose ethics are suspect may play a role, if only as an example of what not to do. We can see on the world stage that leaders are generally good in one area but quite fallible in others. We cannot expect people to be perfect. The same goes for gurus. That being the case we accept what is good and leave the rest. We absorb the nutritious aspects of the connection and move on.

There is a guru tradition which is higher than the secondary gurus. The *guru-sishya* tradition or *parampara* or lineage is a sacred bond that is unbreakable. The particular *sampradaya* (or school) of Bhagavan Ramana is not a new one. If we read carefully the writings or talks of Bhagavan we see that he is the incarnation of Lord Dakshinamurti. The salient feature of this tradition is the transmission of the highest teachings through silence. Ādi Śankara is also identified with Dakshinamurti and it was not by accident he composed the *Dakṣiṇamūrti Stotram*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p.189. 'Sankaracharya's Hymn to Dakshinamurti' (Translated from Sri Bhagavan's Tamil rendering). The Invocation states: "That [Lord] Sankara who appeared as Dakshinamurti to grant peace to the great ascetics (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata), who revealed his real state of silence, and who has expressed the nature of the Self in this hymn, abides in me." See also Sadhu Natanananda's *Ramana Darsanam*, Section Two, 'As the First Guru Indicating Supreme Silence'. pp.9-10.

Why silence and not words that we can understand? What is silence anyway?

It is worth quoting extensively from the anthropologist Lyall Watson, who wrote in his book *Elephantoms*,

...reluctantly, I learned the lesson of silence.

It wasn't easy. Western awareness insists on things as the focus of sensation. We find it very hard to think of nothing. Emptiness makes us uncomfortable. Silence is, more often than not, interrupted by thoughtless applause from someone who thinks the symphony is over. We are all a little anxious about intervals, finding it very difficult to foster the art of the meaningful pause. We do our best to abolish empty space, dead air, filling it instead with clutter, forgetting that it is precisely the nothingness between things that defines them, setting them apart from one another.

We need to stop talking and listen. Learn to listen to silence because the secrets often lie in the space between the sounds. The sounds of silence.

Oriental and African notions of time and music give equal value to object and interval. By accepting space as an area of change and expression, they create new rhythms. It doesn't matter that intervals, by their very nature, are incomplete. This helps to invite participation, allowing us to immerse ourselves, not in notes or other concrete things, but in the silence in between.<sup>3</sup>

It is all very well to read spiritual literature but not endlessly. There comes a point where we put into practice what we learnt at second hand. Concepts are not going to ameliorate our suffering, only practice can do so. Just as healing does not come from just listening to advice or reading medical literature, but actually from applying the medicine. When we are healed we no longer read the manual or consume the remedy.

The first step in applying the medication is learning to listen to the many voices inhabiting our consciousness. There is so much noise we cannot hear ourselves think. Our task is not so much to shut up the

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<sup>3</sup> Watson, Lyall, *Elephantoms, Tracking the Elephant*. W.W. Norton, New York. 2002. pp.65-66.

cacophony but to carefully listen to what the voices have to say and to do that we need to be silent and harmoniously absorb rather than reject. We are able to understand their significance and what those voices have to teach us. When we are conscious of a thought we can then ask the important question: to whom does it come?

In a way it is the small things that matter. We read stories about disciples who learn from their master by observing them in their everyday affairs, tying their shoe laces, effortlessly pouring oil in the lamp or eating food.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately everything we do or say has significance. But first we must listen.

We hear of those who claim to be in the lineage or *parampara* of Bhagavan. It is a nice thought but it actually reveals an ignorance of who Bhagavan was in history and who he is now. Firstly, Bhagavan has never left so why the necessity to pass on the lineage? The proof of that is the increasing number of people who come to the ashram to receive his blessings. People are not fools and though we may behave foolishly at times we intuitively know what is good for us. When we bathe in the sublime light at the Samadhi we know it is not an illusion. The proof is the profound peace we feel.

And secondly, if someone claims affiliation with Bhagavan, is it because they wish to be immersed in the reflected glory of his name? Is it that the truth they proclaim is insufficient and they cannot stand on their own feet?<sup>5</sup>

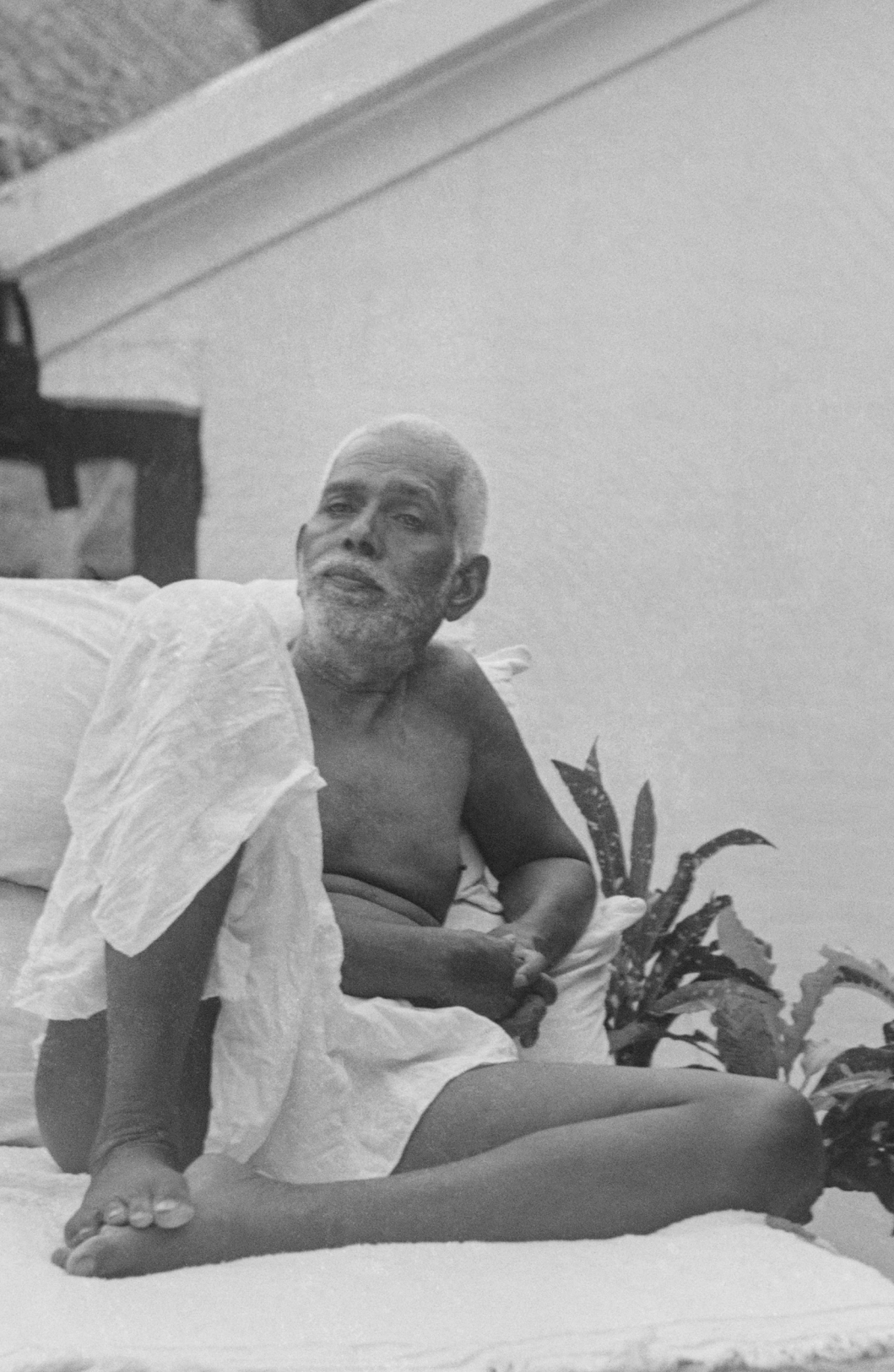
Bhagavan is Bhagavan. He is unique. That is why we hunger to be in his Presence. We too are unique but refuse to be truly who we are, and until we do, we live in the shadow of his magnificent light.




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<sup>4</sup> A rabbi said, “I do not go to the maggid [Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezritz] in order to hear the Torah from him, but to see how he unlaces his felt shoes and laces them up again.” *Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters*, by Martin Buber. London, 1956, p.107. A true master is whole in his or her life and every act is a demonstration of their *jñāna*. Bhagavan Ramana invariably left his leaf plate immaculate after a meal. Nothing was ever wasted. No gesture was superfluous.

<sup>5</sup> There is the curious case of a Robert Adams, an American guru who asserted that he was at Sri Ramanasramam between 1947-8 and 1952 (the dates vary in his conversations) and that he moved closely with Bhagavan. Until such time as there appears objective, verifiable evidence to substantiate this claim, we cannot but come to the conclusion that his account is unreliable.





# Self-Enquiry, Change, and the Nature of Brahman

RAM BROWN CROWELL

It is true that Bhagavan's initial experience of the divine state, in which he ever after remained, was spontaneously produced and not the result of anything he read in books or practised. Yet afterwards in those first years when he felt compelled out of compassion to answer the questions of sincere devotees and he was shown various sacred texts, he recognized that the teachings of Advaita Vedanta conformed most closely to his own experience and began to express himself in those terms, even eventually himself translating some of their texts. In doing so Bhagavan kept to the simple essence, leaving aside complex philosophical issues, though he was familiar enough with these to settle questions about them that arose from time to time amongst the learned scholar-poets like Ganapati Muni who sat at His Feet.

His teaching was simplicity itself. He pointed out that really we have two selves – a true Self, the Atman, which exists eternally,

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independently of the body, and shines by its own light (*svayamprakasa*) – and a false self or ego (*ahamkar*), which is the seat of the body-mind complex and the personality with all its desires and attachments, and which rises and sets with the body. Though the ego appears as an independent, intelligent entity, it actually shines by the light it borrows from the Self, since by itself it is *jada*, or inert, being only matter in an ultra-rarified form.

All our troubles arise from wrong identification with this false self: we take the ego as our real Self and identify with the sufferings and limitations of the body-mind. Why does this occur? The reason cannot be known until wrong identification ceases, when it is seen to have been due to primal ignorance (*mūlāvidyā*) of our true nature (as Atman). This is not our fault, since Advaita holds that it is a universal limiting condition (*upādhi*) of our being born in human form (*jīvātman*).

The solution which Bhagavan advocated for correcting our mistaken identification of self was the practice of Self-enquiry, called *ātma-vicāra*, which will be forever associated with his name. This consists simply of asking the question, ‘Who am I?’, and allowing the ‘answer’, in whatever form (or non-form) it may come, to arise silently as an experience when the mind is stilled in the Heart cave (*hrdaya-guhā*).

The initial goal of one’s practice is to observe how deeply identified we are with our small self, the ego. But since our mind in its ceaseless identification with its own thoughts can never observe itself, something else must discern its modifications. The beauty of Bhagavan’s teaching is that in the very act of asking, ‘Who am I?’ we become, *ipso facto*, aware of our true Self in its aspect as the witness, since it is only from its locus that our thoughts can be observed.

As its witness, we see how the mind constantly changes in terms of our thoughts and emotions, but we realise also that what sees these changes cannot itself be changing, even though it is very much ‘alive’ as the spiritual life-force within us. This witness-self, called *sākṣī* in Sanskrit, stands as the sentinel or first appearance of the *Ātman* in consciousness; from it, light of the Self (*Ātma-jyoti*), shines into and illuminates the intellect (*buddhi*).

Bhagavan’s question, “Who am I” goes to the heart of the universal human quest for true Self-knowledge. The first time we truly hear this

question is unforgettable – something comes alive within us, almost akin to *mantra-dīkshā*, but much more dynamic. Like a sword it cuts through the delusive attachments created in ignorance by the body-mind, and we become aware, glowing within us, of the increasingly spacious cave of the heart where the Self abides in peaceful awareness as the *sākṣī*.

Even so, it is not so simple, for we are at sea until we begin actually to experience the fruits of our enquiry, and the dawning wisdom of true Self-knowledge becomes more and more stable in us (*sthiti-prajñā*). Though there are exceptions as in Bhagavan's own case, for most of us this will occur as a gradual process over many years, if not a lifetime. During this time we may still often fall back into old habits of ego-identification and find ourselves subjected to our old fears and desires, patterns and preferences, and suffer from their effects as before – as though, despite making self-enquiry, nothing has changed.

Old habits die hard – especially ones engrained through lifetimes – and we find the road of *sādhana* has many hills going up and down so that we must continue to face the often painful effects of unwanted change. This is perhaps especially true when the inner change we long for – experience of Self (*ātmānubhāva*) – is absent or appears 'slow' in coming.

Here it is perhaps but natural in our sincerity to make one of two common mistakes. The first is to think that an external change, which is easier to make, will necessarily conduce to the deep, inner change we seek. Thus we think that a change in job, or partner, or country, or in worldly state – for example, renouncing the world and taking *sannyāsa* – will help us to attain the goal within, and indeed for some, in certain cases, this may be true. But to those who came to him Bhagavan did not advise anyone to renounce the world; they would, he said, simply be exchanging one set of clothing for another, while the person who wore either remained the same with his tired set of habits. Instead, his response would be invariable: who is it, he would ask, who wants to change? Thus refocusing the seeker's attention back to the right object (of *ātma-vicāra*), rather than on the external, passing object of the ego's attention.

The second mistake is a variation of the first that affects even the most dedicated and sincere *sādhaka*-s. This is to yield to the temptation

to deal with the distracting impact of change by removing oneself as far from it as possible or practicable, so as to reduce its effect on our life. Perhaps we may go to live by a forest, or in a remote mountain village, or holed up as a recluse in a city, ‘keeping a low profile’, giving up society and friends, and insulating oneself as much as possible from life’s unwanted, destabilising, outward changes. It is easy to persuade oneself that there is a valid justification for this.

Do we not see, when writing or studying for an exam or writing a report at the office, or even when watching television, that we turn off other distractions, closing doors and windows if need be, and asking others to keep quiet, so as to keep noise to a minimum and increase our ability to concentrate upon the work (or pleasure) at hand? It is natural to think that the same would hold true for the practice of *ātma-vicāra*: our ability to enquire would increase in proportion to our ability to lead a tension-free life and immunity from its stressful, demanding changes.

This is of course a traditional response of spiritual life, especially in India, to the distracting influence of worldly change. It is as old as the Upanishads and the institution of the first renunciate order of the Buddha himself (the Sangha); passages in many sacred texts such as the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* lend support to it or advocate it. In itself there is nothing wrong in this and for very many, now as in the past, it is no doubt a wise move and well done.

But discrimination and good judgement are needed. If one’s isolation from the world is done as *a move towards* a goal one feels heartfelt attraction for and a growing experience of, then all well and good. But if it is done more as *a move away* from facing a life-situation of constant change whose demands one fears and wants to escape from, then recourse to other options may offer a better solution from both worldly and spiritual points of view. Here again, as Nisargadatta Maharaj says, “motive matters supremely” and the seeker must decide for himself or herself what their personal truth is.

There are others, whose study of Advaita texts perhaps exceeds their experience from practice, who may become psychologically averse or resistant to change due to a misapprehension in their understanding of the nature of Brahman as given by Sankara. It is true in his commentaries on the *Gītā* and *Brahma Sutra* that Sankara

gives pride of place to the *nirguṇa* (formless) aspect of Brahman over its *saguṇa* aspect (with form) – which for Sankara has only a provisional (*prātibhāsika*) reality, being finally illusory (*mithyā*) as a product of *avidyā-Māyā*. This is Brahman’s mysterious, inexplicable (*anirvacanīya*) power of making things appear other than they are – *i.e.*, as many instead of One (*a-dvaita*). This leads Sankara to discount Brahman with Form, including the universe, God, and other selves (*jīva*-s), since these are for him but appearances destined to disappear, in favour of the Formless Brahman to which he assigns ontological priority since it is beyond the illusory realm of *Māyā*.

Sankara thus holds that the highest *mukti* for the *jīva* is the direct experience of *nirguṇa Brahman* which occurs through the sublation (*bādhā*) of all forms in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, rather than the experience of identity (*aikya*) with some form of Brahman, such as a personal God like Krishna or Rama, in *savikalpa samādhi*. It is this philosophical bias in Sankara toward the unchanging, formless aspect of Brahman that some may carry over into their personal lives. They may feel that change – or whatever changes – is unreal, secondary, and of less importance than trying to distinguish, and live in, a changeless substratum behind appearances, which then becomes a feature of their spiritual practice (*sādhana*).

But just because something changes doesn’t make it less real: there is in fact nothing that doesn’t change, nothing absolutely at rest, in the entire universe: transformation is at the heart of all creation. Brahman is utterly dynamic through and through. He is, in his ever-new light and joy, the source of all change itself: where else could alteration come from, since everything comes from Him only? *What doesn’t change* is Brahman’s own nature as remaining identical with itself: as Being, as Himself, Brahman is utterly at rest. If this sounds paradoxical, it is – Brahman is unique: there is nothing else like Brahman.

Unlike milk, for instance, which can change into curd, or a seed which becomes a tree, Brahman, while apparently sponsoring all forms, remains ever identical with Himself just as water remains water even as ice, waves, or moisture. Where is there room, so to speak, for Brahman to change? Brahman *is* all that is – all forms and whatever is beyond form exist solely in or as Brahman *qua* Being (*Sat*) itself – there is no other. In this context, we may recall Bhagavan’s own

remark when devotees lamented his impending passing: “Why do you grieve? I am not going anywhere – where else is there for me to go?” So, while in itself the identity of Brahman *qua* Brahman does not change, the paradox is that Brahman is forever changing. If this still seems strange to us we have only to remember and consider the unique, paradoxical nature of our own consciousness.

For is not the bicameral nature of Brahman perfectly mirrored in the two-fold nature of our own consciousness, even as Bhagavan taught? One part as the ego with its thoughts and feelings is constantly changing, while another part as the witness of these changes remains ever the same with itself. For instance, do we not feel our consciousness is the same now as it was as far back as we can remember? That the core of our self-identity as self-aware consciousness has been continuously the same?

And yet, has not this consciousness, while being absolutely at rest as itself, at the same time been ever dynamic as the vital, ever-radiant light of awareness and attention within us, lighting up, as it were, every thought, every feeling, every action of our minds and hearts? How is this simultaneous, two-fold nature possible? How can it be rationally described to the mind? It cannot. From it, as from Brahman itself, “words fall back” as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* says (II.9.1), for the mind being finite can never understand the nature of Brahman which is infinite. Alfred North Whitehead observed in another context, “No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature itself is the ground of rationality.”

When we understand that there is something very real deep within us which, unlike everything else, while absolutely dynamic, is not subject to change, we begin to recognize the true nature of our Self. According to some commentators, the Sanskrit term for this Self, the *Ātman*, derives from the verbal root ‘at’ – to eat. So *Ātman* would mean, ‘eater of thoughts’ (+ ‘man’ from the verbal root, ‘to think’). There could be no better etymology, for that which ‘eats’ even mind itself can only be our true nature. Thus to realise this Self is indeed Self-realisation.

Even so, though we seek to modify the circumstances of our lives and be comfortable within ourselves, we are in general afraid of change. Although we are aware each moment is unique, we resist it because we continually repeat in our ignorant way our old familiar

patterns and conditionings, our *vāsanā*-s. When everything is unaltered we feel secure. Actually all we do is freeze our perception into a tight band of limited consciousness. We insulate ourselves from adjustment and dwell in the delusion that our unchanged existence replicates the nature of Brahman. We have seen that it does not. By reinforcing our conditioning it actually weakens and diminishes our ability to cope with the transformation that is at the heart of all life. Thus we retard our spiritual progress and remain bound by our own conditionings, we neither grow nor expand. Our spiritual knowledge and experience likewise remain limited by our not allowing ourselves to accept and be fully open to change. ▲

## A Lesson : Corinthians 13

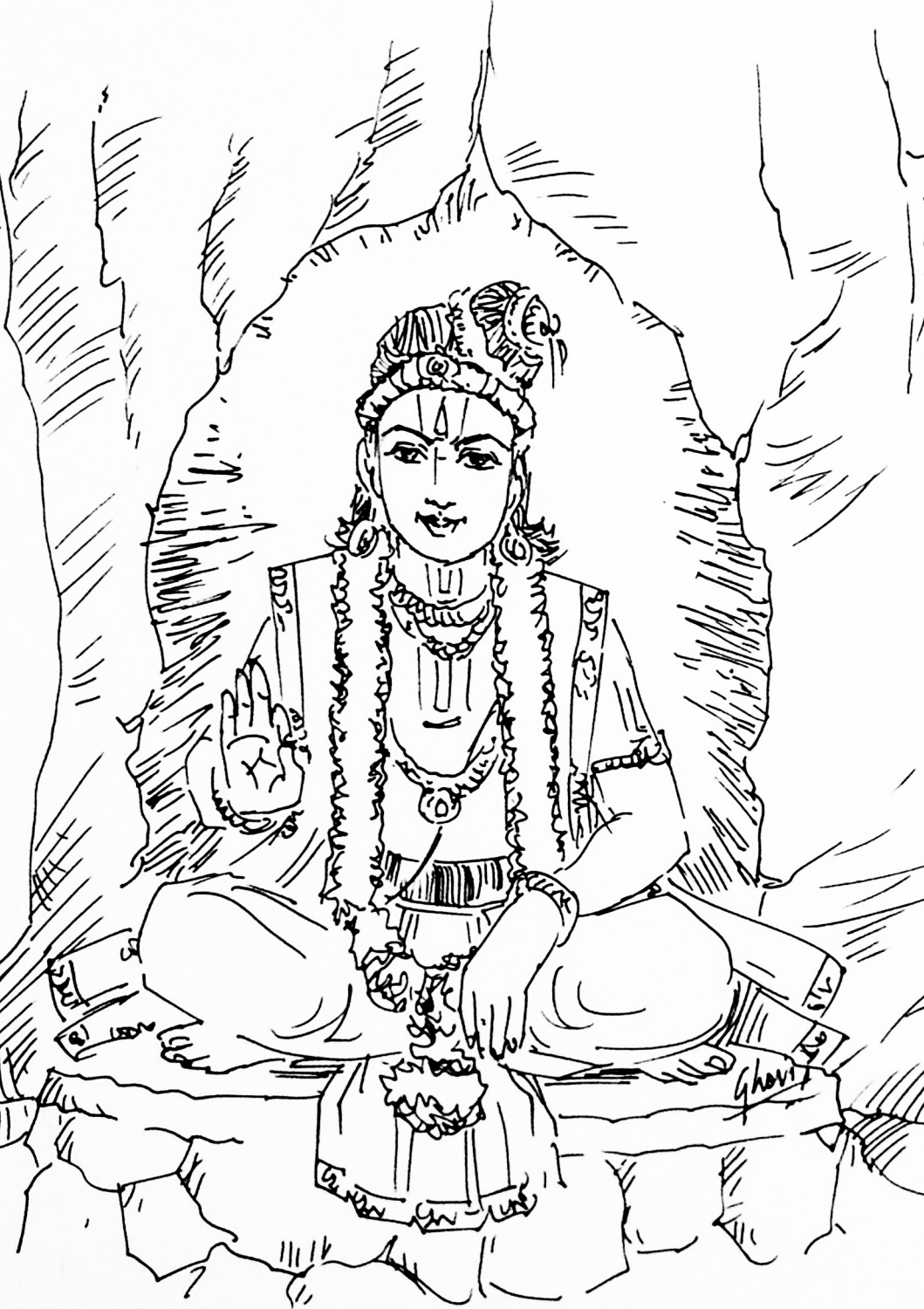
Geetha Ravichandran

Love was actually Greek to me.  
And though I knew  
many metaphors  
to express fine sentiments,  
it had to be pared down  
to fit through a pinhole called heart.

Sometimes it seemed to be,  
just a sport, sometimes a craft  
– dabbling with colours  
to brighten a drab canvas.

Till the lesson at the doorstep-  
to remain kind, to remain calm  
to keep no record of all  
that went wrong.

Through the pinhole called heart,  
rises the vision of the fiery red hill  
covered with jade grass.  
And in the molten light –  
a laughing thrush sings,  
to a swollen river.





# Nammalvar: The Small and the Large

SHARADA BHANU

*The term alvar means one who has dived deep in the ocean of the lord. Twelve alvars, poet saints devoted to Vishnu, are celebrated according to tradition and Nammalvar (8th to 9th century CE) is the chief. He is regarded with such reverence that his images are installed in South Indian Vishnu temples and his name, Satagopan, is given to the representation of the feet of the lord. He was born in Tamil Nadu in Kurukur (today known as Alvarthirunagari) to a peasant family of the Vellala caste. He composed four works of which the Tiruvaymoli is the most important. His poetry had a profound influence on Vaishnavite theology. Madhurakavi alvar was the disciple of Nammalvar. By birth a Brahmin, he was older than Nammalvar and well versed in the scriptures. Only eleven verses by him exist and they are in celebration of his guru. One of them describes not Krishna but the depth of emotion with which his master, Nammalvar would narrate an incident in the life of Krishna. Yashoda, unable to watch over the mischievous infant, took a piece of string and tried to tie the baby to the pounding stone. The string was a little too short. She attached another piece but it proved again too short. She attached piece after piece but the string stayed – just a little – inadequate. When she*

*paused baffled and defeated, the lord in compassion to his mother, allowed himself to be tied and the infinitely large brought itself within the confines of the small.*

*All translations are taken from the classic A K Ramanujan's Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu by Nammalvar, essential reading for anyone seeking an insight into the bhakti movement and the poetry of Nammalvar.*

**D**rawn by a light in the sky the ideal disciple Madhurakavi came to Kurukur from Kashi and found it led to the silent boy in the hollow of a tamarind tree. A living mystery, unmoving and apparently mute, he had eaten nothing since birth. Named Maran by his parents he would come to be known as the most celebrated of the *Alvars* – Nammalvar. What did the seeker Madhurakavi want to know? Whether the entity he was addressing was indeed the living home of the infinite, a sat guru? Did he hope to find out how this person could live without motion or sleep or food? Did he need to understand the relationship between matter and spirit, the visible and invisible, the temporal and the infinite? Madhurakavi asked the boy a riddling question which covered all these issues and would have taken a sage to understand and a jnani to answer: ‘When the small is born in the stomach of the dead what does it eat and where does it rest?’ The boy, till then silent, replied ‘*That* it will eat and *there* it will rest!’ The ‘dead’ has been interpreted to mean matter (*prakriti*), and the ‘small’, subtle spirit, either the individual soul, jiva (the conventional explanation) or the infinite One, Ishwara. The answer, as with all of Nammalvar’s work copes with the philosophical issue for all time, as well as makes sense for the moment in which it is uttered. ‘That’ (any object further away, not this) and ‘there’ (a place that is further off, not here) are terms that point away from the speaker, into the distance. They are both general terms as well as capable of being utterly specific as they would have been if Nammalvar had actually pointed to objects before him (that place/object out there). Do the words ‘there’ and ‘that’ in this answer point to rock or tree or man or animal (specific)? Or to the whole visible world (general)? Or do they point nowhere, to the utterly invisible and unlocated (general)? Or both? The answer to this depends on the level of the seeker’s spiritual evolution – if he/

she has reached a certain level of understanding, the one spirit will be seen everywhere, though confined nowhere. If he/she is ignorant, the answer will make no sense and the Infinite will remain as if NOT there – invisible and unlocated. To turn to the question of what the spirit eats – the hearer Madhurakavi is challenged to understand that the infinite eats everything outside this speaker, including him, Madhurakavi himself. If he accepts this answer, believes it and makes it his own, it must now echo in his heart. The spirit eats me and everything outside me, including the one who answered, this sage under the tree.

Many commentators have realized that the question posed by Madhurakavi was really a test by which the seeker was probing the master. Madhurakavi was wordlessly asking, ‘Are you the guru I seek and can you understand and *be* the answer to my question?’ Nammalvar was replying, ‘Yes, if you are the disciple for whom I have been waiting and can understand and *live* the answer I give.’ The central paradox remains – Nammalvar points away from himself but he *is* the goal of the quester. When Madhurakavi falls at the feet of the Master his action indicates that the disciple has proved his own worth, found his guru, lost himself in surrender and received and ingested his answer. The infinite feeds on you and me and everything; it rests in you and me and everywhere.

This article explores the possibility that the poems in *Tiruvaymoli* constitute an expanded answer to Madhurakavi’s question – if the subtle spirit is born inside dead matter what does IT eat and where does IT rest? Most devotees need to hear the truth not just once but over and over again, to recite it, sing it, to live it, before it becomes theirs. Hence the poems explore the answer from multiple perspectives.

To begin with there are poems which see Viṣṇu as Creator. Is the subtle born of the dead at all?

In that original moment  
Our lord and father

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<sup>1</sup> The *Tiruvaymoli* consists of 1102 verses/poems arranged in tens and grouped by compilers into hundreds. This number indicates that the poem is the ninth in the fourth decad of the seventh hundred poems. The last word of each poem is the first word of the next; thus the whole work can be read as a single poem, celebrating the endless variety of the One indivisible spirit.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Made earth, water, fire, wind, / And sky  
And the mountains... 7.4.9.<sup>1</sup>

The poet includes in his list of created things the sun, moon, and rain, 'all that lives by rain and the gods of rain.' In a single moment inert matter and living beings have emerged from the subtle, not the other way round. If the subtle seems to have emerged out of the inert this is merely an illusion generated by the

master of illusions... form and breath of all things. 2.3.2.

You dwell in heaven/stand on the sacred mountain  
sleep on the ocean/roll around in the earth. 6.9.5.

Having created, the subtle has not withdrawn from his creation but remains infused and indivisible. Is matter itself just thing, '*sethathu*', dead and inert? In poems 2.1.4,5 and 6 the poet assuming the persona of a love-lorn girl, addresses the north wind, sky and moon, wondering if they too are 'perishing for love of him'. This is no mere pathetic fallacy or even graceful conformity to a convention in the *aham* tradition of Sangam poetry. At one level, the speaker's passion has infused her own love into the universe. But such overwhelming devotion provides a gateway to the truth – the Lord *is*

the three worlds in all their beauty. 7.6.4.

What does the one spirit eat? The answer offered in poem after poem is 'The earth, the sea and me'. The Lord is thought to be lying on the ocean of milk, his repeated descents to earth are narrated in his avatars and he is worshipped in various cities and temples in the form of an icon. Thus he seems to be small, contained by earth and water. However the hidden truth is that he is the large and contains, 'eats', the earth, sea and the speaker. The myth that is used here is the one of baby Krishna swallowing mud. His mother Yashoda has caught him in the act and makes him open his mouth and sees not the tell-tale evidence she expects, but a vision of the world.

Pure one/ you devoured once  
the sea-surrounded world. 6.2.7.

In this well-known incident in the childhood of Krishna, a scene that is endearing, domestic, common and trivial suddenly metamorphoses into the cosmic and the immense. The lord opens his mouth to reveal to his stunned mother that he contains the whole



universe and by implication, her also. The child who seems to be a tiny and negligible mite on the immense earth has now swallowed it whole and contains it within himself. Thus *siriyathu*, the subtle, eats everything that exists. Child and cosmos-swallower coalesce in a poem that simultaneously answers what it eats and where it rests:

Ruling three worlds,/ devouring them altogether,  
 my lord rests on a banyan leaf:  
 darker than the sea,  
 Kannan,  
 child perching on my hip. 1.9.4.

He is both ruler and consumer. He rests on sea and land, solid and liquid. In Vaishnavaithe theology the lord is believed to be present as *para*, beyond everything, in his incarnations, or avatars, in his *arca* or icons and as *antaryamin*, the indweller who pervades all creation. Vishnu in his transcendent form is pictured lying on the ocean of milk. He is like the earth in being sea-surrounded and like the sea in his colour (therefore separate) but it is also true that as devourer, as raincloud and wedded to Bhudevi, he *is* the sea and the earth (therefore one). He is an avatar in mythological space as well as *this* small child now, *here* on the speaker's hip.

In Vaishnavaithe theology the lord is believed to be present as *para*, beyond everything, as *vyuha*, manifesting auspicious qualities and generating the processes of creation, in *vibhava*, his incarnations, or *avatars*, as *antaryamin*, the indweller who pervades all creation and in *arca* or his icons. If he were outside, he could be reached, if separate he could be served, adored, attained. By presenting himself as avatar and icon he graciously allows this easy access. But there is a fundamental illogic in such propositions which is indomitably laid bare. In poem 1.8.7 the subtle is first identified as the hero and conqueror of legend who 'took the seven bulls by the horns' (the lord is outside the speaker in a public, mythological space). The lord moves everything and everyone into himself when represented next as the devourer of 'the seven worlds' (he is still technically outside, but we and the worlds are food, inside). Then the speaker moves from general to particular, *para* (transcendent) to *antaryamin* (indweller). By (revealing his presence within) the lord 'made me his own cool place/ in heaven'. The speaker contains the lord in himself so has become the space

where the lord *resides*, Vaikuntam (outside, to the Lord inside). But the point about eating is that food is ingested, absorbed. From the spatial, Nammalvar moves to the mental and immaterial ‘and (the lord) thought of me/what I thought of him’. Osmosis. If they are two, they are flowing into each other. ‘And became my own thoughts’. In this stage, the speaker has been ingested and obliterated; but it is also fact that he has completely absorbed the Divine.

This structure moving from mythological to experiential, outside to inside, public to private, can be seen as representing the story of any seeker’s gradual spiritual development. The devotee may begin by worshipping the lord as one outside him, as an image, for instance, and progress to finding he is an ever-present inner experience. But it can also be interpreted as a world view in which, extraordinary as it may seem, the myth, the ordinary facts of daily existence and the transcendent passionate inner experience, all happen simultaneously and occupy the same order of reality. To the speaker, baby Krishna eating earth is a *fact*, not myth or even a historical event in the remote past. It not merely represents, connects to, validates and supports the inner experience of being possessed and consumed, it *is* that experience. The mental attitude is – ‘Krishna ate earth and revealed the universe inside his mouth. I find myself in the world. So right now I am inside him being eaten and consumed. One with him.’ The myth has literal, immediate, personal reality. This kind of belief is usually impossible for the lukewarm devotee.

Is it possible to say that the subtle is only Ishwara or merely jiva? As another poem defiantly states,

My lord...came here today...entered me...I’ve caught  
him/the big bellied one...I contain him now. 10.8.2 .

This is a mutual breaching of boundaries. Interpenetrated, they eat each other. In 8.7.9, every line of which begins ‘*Vayiṭṭil koṇḍu*’, ‘Having taken into his stomach’ the focus is on the abdomen as connected to digestion and gestation.

My dark one  
Stands there as if nothing’s / Changed  
After taking entire / Into his maw  
All three worlds  
The gods/ And the good kings

Who hold their lands / As a mother would  
 A child in her womb –  
 And I / By his leave / Have taken him entire  
 And I have him in my belly  
 For keeps. 8.7.9

The belly contains and consumes food but can also hold a baby which is protected, nourished and cherished. The inference would be that the Lord consumes, loves and protects the worlds and his subjects. The devotee feeds on, loves and cherishes, with triumph and elation, the Lord within.

One can also look at the *Tiruvaymoli* as a response to the second part of Madhurakavi's question – where does he rest or exist, *enge kidakkum?* At one level the poems have simple answers – the Divine is present reclining on the ocean of milk. He is in his own heavenly city, Vaikuntam. He is in each of his avatars which are both events in the historical past and enact themselves again and again in the devotee's life and heart. He is the boar tossing up the earth with his tusks (7.4.3), Rama destroying the island, 'demon carcasses falling in hundreds' (7.4.7), etc. He is in his temples and temple cities, in Vaikuntam, Dwaraka, Maliruncholai, and others; in the saint's own hometown of Kurukur. He is present in his beloved form, with discus and conch and is readily available in his *arca* or worshipable image. Again and again, with love the poet dwells on this: 'his body dark as thundercloud/feet covered with flowers/and anklets of war.' 8.10.2. In distress, the helpless can turn to this never-failing shelter: 'think of the lord's feet and live.' 4.1.1. The divine lives in his devotees; 'the gods bow down before them.' 3.5.8. and the speaker doubts whether even heaven can provide the joy he feels 'right here in this world' when worshipping 'at the feet of his men.' 8.10.2.

However, the most profound answer of *Tiruvaymoli* is that the one spirit lives in everything. This depth of awareness communicated by the alvar leads to an extension and modification of every statement in the previous paragraph. He is in Vaikuntam (and the speaker *is* Vaikuntam and Venkatam too); he is in his own temples (and also the temples of all other gods); he is in his avatars (and in millions of beings who are therefore also avatars); he is in his icon (and in the mountain, unshaped stone); he is in his worshippers (and all other



people). Thus, the poet claims, ‘He rests in the earth, sea and me. In the earth, also the sea/space which contains the earth. In me who am contained by the earth and sea and therefore inside him, but since he is inside me I contain him.’ Joy, freedom, peace and wisdom lie in not merely understanding and accepting, but living this knowledge.

The Vamana Trivikrama avatar where Vishnu shrank into the divine dwarf and then at the appropriate moment he enlarged his little body till it measured all the three worlds is a key to understanding spatial issues and the implicit answer to ‘where does it rest’. The subtle and little expands to swallow up everything that exists. In poem 8.10.3., the speaker wonders whether he (both little in eminence and being embodied) would care to dematerialise and enlarge himself to enter the infinitely subtle fragrance, the feet of the Lord, when the great servants of the Lord, his masters, have taken on little human lives and are content to roam the world. Since the lesson Mahabali had to learn was one of humility, one can appreciate the dilemma implicit in the question. Even to seek stillness and a loss of identity in reverently joining the feet of the lord may be an act of ahankara when the great have become embodied, and work humbly in the world. Mahabali himself may be regarded as a mighty emperor trodden underfoot (moving from great to small) or egoistic asura redeemed by the touch of the Lord’s feet (small into great). From another point of view, small into large and large into small are all part of the infinite play of the Lord and therefore the dynamics are replicated in the devotee too, who has no existence apart from the Infinite.

When I didn’t know a thing  
 You made me love / Your service  
 Mixing inseparably /with my soul  
 when I /your servant  
 was in the illusion of unknowing  
 you dwarf incognito  
 who once said to great Bali  
 “give me space / Just three steps”  
 And cheated him of everything  
 Before anyone knew. 2.3.3.

The dwarf, the subtle is always in disguise; the spiritual life begins with the divine asking for just a little space in our lives; a few

moments; just a leaf or a flower. The individual complies and before he knows it the dwarf is a pillar stretching into space and has taken over his whole life. Thus the vama avatar plays itself out in the devotee's experience. However the devotee's unknowing itself may be an illusion. He is after all, the supreme fact. Several poems return to the word *ninra* translated as 'he stands there'. A K Ramanujan in his Afterword on page 24 to his translation of Nammalvar's poems elucidates, 'The Lord is one, becomes many, yet remains one. . . . *ninra-tu* means 'that which is permanent, immovable, remainder, as standing over. . . ' though he has become and is all things. . . he is not them – he 'stands there' apart.' The image suggests the fixity of the icon in the temple as well as the towering stature of Vamana/Trivikrama ('dwarf. . . becoming oblivion, memory. . . becoming every act. . . and every consequence. . . you stand there' 7.8.6.) The phrase captures the stillness of Being of the Lord, that which remains, discounting all his varied becomings, his endless names and forms, his bewildering fusion of opposites. He is untouched by the qualities of all his creations. If the universe itself were consumed in a 'roaring meal of chaos' 7.4.4, the Lord, its eater, would still be there. This completes the answer to '*enge kidakkum*'.

So is *siriyatu*, the subtle, jiva or Ishwara? The two are not the same thus validating worship, the service of devotee to Master, the relation of bhakti between seeker and the Lord and the humility of the finite towards the infinite. But the infinite cannot be seen as separate either, as it has eaten, occupied, permeated, taken over the finite which has no existence apart from the infinite.

It's true  
 Even I am you /even the unbearable hell  
 of this world  
 is you  
 this being so /what's the difference?  
 One may go to paradise /And reach perfect joy  
 Or go the other way / And fall into hell  
 Yet I being I / Even when I remember  
 I am you  
 I still fear hell:  
 Lord in perpetual paradise  
 Let me be at your feet. 8.1.9

This poem copes with the terrifying but perfectly logical inferences that have to be made after the lord takes the devotee over. The commonplace devotee hopes to avoid hell and get to paradise someday, probably after death when he will have discarded an inconvenient body and purified an imperfect mind. The problem with this mindset, is that fulfillment is perpetually postponed to the future and the present life is an accommodation to the hell of body, mind and samsara. Living the lord's presence makes nonsense of 'becoming' in its overwhelming 'here and now'. To someone in the grip of *paramabhakti* there is really no 'I' and no 'World' however hellish, that is separate from the lord. It is well understood in multiple royal traditions that the court is not a building any more than Vaikuntam is a palace in the sky. The court is where the king is. If the King of kings chooses to reveal to you his presence either within or without then you *are* in Vaikuntam. So at the core of Being, when the devotee is in the presence of the lord, there is no difference between paradise and hell.

The omnipresence of the lord cancels opposites such as good and evil, rising and falling, heaven and hell. Having undergone a terrifying expansion in the first two lines, the speaker takes refuge from these implications by shrinking again into a limited self which is still troubled by a human fear of hell and finds relief in surrender, occupying the safe space at the Lord's feet.

The poet knows he has been taken over, possessed, his words are not his, but uttered by the divine. This is not humility or worse, concealed egoism. It records experiential fact.

Lord of all  
 You already know my song  
 My poem / My feeling  
 Indweller of eyes O inward of my heart  
 My words / Come  
 Say something. 7.1.6.

It is an axiom now taught to school children, that ancient Tamil was three-fold; never existing as merely words on a page but living simultaneously as literature, song and performance. Thus the 'I' of the poems must be understood as never the poet alone but always the speaker/reader/chanter. In every reading or recitation, belief and love facilitate an act of appropriation: 'O inward of my heart, my words'.

The poems not merely deliver a living personal message to an ever-new audience, they move in, possess, become food, create their own space and speak themselves through ‘other’ mouths.

It is important to remember that while Madhurakavi asked a question with deep spiritual implications, the relationship between large and small, matter and life, he was also dealing with basics. Everyone needs to eat and occupy a little space. So what...? Where...? The reply of Nammalvar to Madhurakavi lies not in the words alone but in the vital interaction between master and disciple, which brings them into relation with each other and the world. In the act of answering, Nammalvar has replied to another unspoken question: ‘You think I am motionless, like a statue, but the divine having activated your steps, moves in me. See, I move now. You think I am speechless but the divine, having inspired your words, now speaks through me. You think I am ‘out there’, but I am also ‘in here’, inside you. My words have moved in. You think I don’t eat but I have ingested the divine One who has already swallowed me.

You, me and everyone/everything. One and a community.’

The name Satakopan given to Nammalvar means one who at birth with ‘*kopa*’ angrily rejected the ‘*sata*’ the descending veil of *vasanas*, limiting tendencies from past births. With no such tendencies to structure his experience the alvar is ever immersed in the infinite. Is the sadguru the One? Or does he merely point the disciple to the One? Or does he both function by pointing forward and enlighten by losing himself in the Infinite? Nammalvar’s answer with deep humility points away – That it eats and There it rests. However the answer seals the matter for the questing Madhurakavi – this is the one he seeks. Apparently he remained at the beloved feet of his master, worshipping Narayana himself only in the one who plumbed the depths, his *alvar*.



# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Three

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**6th December 1978**

Question: If this waking state is a dream, how to explain the fact that each time we wake up we are in the same surroundings that we were in when we fell asleep, whereas in each dream we are in different surroundings?

Sadhu Om: We should not consider each period of waking to be a separate dream. The whole of our present waking-life, from birth to death, is one long dream, not many short ones. In this one dream we dream that we are now awake, but that this waking state is regularly interrupted by periods of sleep, and that sleep is sometimes interrupted by dreams. Those dreams are subsidiary to the one long dream of our present waking like. They are dreams occurring within a dream.

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

The fact that dreams occur within a dream is illustrated by what many of us have experienced, namely waking up from one dream into another. That is, sometimes a dream comes to an end and we find ourselves lying in our bed, so we think we have woken up and begin to go about our daily activities, but then we wake up again and realise that the first ‘waking’ was from one dream into another dream. Within a dream we can dream any number of subsidiary dreams, and within each subsidiary dream we can dream other dreams. Therefore whatever dreams we may dream during our present life are just dreams within a dream.

Question: A friend told me that you had once explained to him that in a dream it is not the seer of the dream who projected it but the one who is sleeping, because the seer of the dream is part of the projection, but this does not seem to me to be correct, because we are both the dreamer and the seer. Is this what you actually said?

Sadhu Om: He misunderstood what I said. I did not say that the seer of a dream has not projected it but that the person we seem to be in a dream has not projected it. That person is not the seer but an object seen by us, so it is part of the projection. However, because we mistake ourselves to be that person so long as we are dreaming, it seems to us that that person is seeing the dream world.

The same is the case in our present dream. We who are seeing this dream now seem to be a person in it, so this person seems to us to be the seer, even though it is actually an object seen by us. This is why we need to distinguish the seer from everything that is seen. Whatever person we seem to be is just a body and mind, which are objects seen by us, so as the seer of these objects we are distinct from them.

The dreamer of any dream is only ego. As ego we project each dream and see it. Projection and seeing are actually one and the same thing. This is why Bhagavan taught us *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda*, according to which seeing (*dr̥ṣṭi*) is itself creation (*sṛṣṭi*). Whatever we see is just our own thoughts, which we create and see simultaneously, because we create or project a dream merely by seeing it in our own mind.

However, this explanation is not agreeable to everyone, because if we are strongly attached to the person we seem to be, we will not be willing to accept that this person and the world of which it is a

part are all just thoughts projected by us. Therefore different levels of explanation need to be given to suit different levels of spiritual maturity. For the more immature it is said that this world is created by God, and we are just a part of this creation, so it exists whether we see it or not. This is *srṣṭi-drṣṭi-vāda*, the contention that the world is first created and subsequently seen by us.

Many advaita texts and commentaries seem to support this view, and sometimes even Bhagavan gave replies that seem to support it, but they did so only to suit the needs of less mature minds. This is why many who claim to be advaitins do not accept that our present waking life is just a dream, and they can find plenty of support for their beliefs in ancient texts and commentaries.

For example, in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* it is said that this *ātman* is *brahman*, but that it has four quarters. The first quarter is called *vaiśvānara*, whose domain is waking and who is aware of external objects, whereas the second quarter is called *taijasa*, whose domain is dream and who is aware of internal objects. This implies that waking is not just a dream, and that what experiences waking and what experiences dream are in some way different, even though they are said to be two quarters of the same *ātman*.

If we consider our experience carefully, it will be clear to us that we who are now experiencing this present state, which seems to us to be waking, are the same 'I' who experienced all the dreams that we now remember, so why does the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* imply that the experiencer of this state is different to the experiencer of dream? Though we are the experiencer of both these states, we are now aware of ourselves as if we were this body, whereas in any other dream we were aware of ourselves as if we were some other body. Therefore, for those who are very strongly identified with their body and who consequently believe that what is perceiving this world is this body, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* says that what perceives a dream is something other than the person we now seem to be. However, to indicate that the experiencers of each of these two states are not entirely different, it says metaphorically that what experiences waking is one quarter of oneself and what experiences dream is another quarter of oneself. This is therefore a preliminary teaching, intended to prepare people to accept deeper and subtler teachings in due course.

Unlike the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, which distinguishes the experiencer of dream from the experiencer of waking, when I explained to that friend that the person we seem to be in a dream has not projected it, I did not imply that the experiencer of dream is in any way different to the experiencer of waking, firstly because what we now take to be waking is actually just a dream, and secondly because we who experience all dreams are one and the same ego. This one ego is the dreamer of all dreams, and dreaming entails both projecting and perceiving a dream. The point I was making is that we, the dreamer, are not whatever person we dream ourself to be. The person we seem to be in a dream is a part of our dream, so it is not the dreamer but something dreamt by us.

This is what Bhagavan implies in verse 160 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

The spurious being who roams about as ‘I’ is just something that occurs as one among the shadows [images or pictures].

The term he uses here to mean ‘spurious being’ is ‘*pōli uyir*’, in which *pōli* means spurious, false, imitation or seeming, and *uyir* means more or less the same as the Sanskrit term *jīva*, namely life, living being or soul, but here it is not used in the sense of ego but in the sense of a living being or person, because ego is the formless seer whereas the person it mistakes to be ‘I’ is an object seen by it, so Bhagavan says here that this person is ‘one among the shadows’, thereby comparing it to one among the shadow pictures on a cinema screen.

It is necessary for several reasons to clearly understand this distinction between ourself, the dreamer, and whatever person we dream ourself to be. Firstly, it explains why, though we are the creator of all that we see, we seem to have no control over what we are creating, because as soon as we begin to dream any dream, we mistake ourself to be a person in our dream, and thus we seem to be just a small part of our creation. In other words, instead of experiencing ourself as the creator, we now experience ourself as a creature, and as such we have no control over our own creation.

Secondly and most importantly, we need to distinguish ourself, the seer, from everything we see, including the person we seem to be, because unless we do so, we will not be able to effectively investigate



what we actually are. In order to investigate ourself, we need to focus our entire attention on ourself, thereby withdrawing it from everything else, so to do so we need to understand clearly that we are just the seer and not anything seen by us.

By attending to anything that is seen, we are nourishing and sustaining ego, whereas if we attend to ourself, the seer, ego will subside and dissolve back into its source. Then we will see that we are not even the seer, but only the pure awareness from which the seer and everything seen by it appear and into which they disappear.

Sadhu Om: Someone once asked Bhagavan whether devotees who had spent time with him but later left him or even turned against him, such as Perumal Swami, who put a court case against him, had wasted the precious opportunity they had been given. He replied that their association with him cannot go in vain. Even the worst of people will be benefitted by such association, because the seed of *bhakti* and *vairāgya* will thereby be sown in their heart, so though it may not sprout immediately, in due course it will certainly sprout, grow and bear fruit. It may take more time, but it can never fail.

Sadhu Om [talking to a devotee of Bhagavan who understood very little about his teachings]: We all read about Bhagavan's teachings in various books, and thereby we understand something, but mere casual reading is not sufficient. We need to think about them very carefully and deeply. This is called *manana*, which is a necessary prerequisite for effectively practising what he taught us. The more deeply we immerse ourself in his teachings, the more we will learn from them. What he has taught us is very simple but nevertheless extremely deep and subtle, so we can understand them only to the extent that we think deeply about them and put them into practice.

The more we think about his teachings and try to practise them, the more clarity he will give us from within, and thus we will gradually come to understand from our own experience that his silent teaching is always going on in our heart, but that we need to turn within to experience it. Even though he has left his body, he is still guiding us as effectively as he did during his bodily lifetime. We come to understand this clearly as a result of his silent presence in our heart.

If we spend our whole life studying and thinking about his teachings, our life will not have been wasted. Even if we are unable

## MOUNTAIN PATH

to go sufficiently deep in the practice of self-investigation and self-surrender, if we go deep in contemplating his teachings, that will be a worthwhile and fruitful way to spend our life. Meditating on his teachings is a good practice of *guru-bhakti*, second only to actually practising them, because the more deeply we think about them, the more clearly we will understand them, and the more we understand them, the more our love to put them into practice will grow.

If we truly love Bhagavan, we will love his teachings. From love comes knowledge. The more we love him and his teachings, the more we will dwell on them; the more we dwell on them, the more we will understand them; the more we understand them, the more effectively we will be able to practise self-investigation and self-surrender; and the more effectively we practise them, the more clarity of true knowledge will shine brightly in our heart. This is why he said that *bhakti* [love] is the mother of *jñāna* [true knowledge]. ▲

*(To be continued)*

## MOUNTAIN PATH

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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. 31/03/2020

## KEYWORD

# *Darpaṇa/ādarśa:* Mirror

B.K. CROISSANT

## Part One

*Tripurā Rahasya* or *The Mystery Beyond the Trinity* is an ancient scripture of indeterminate date, perhaps somewhere between the Tenth and Fifteenth Centuries A.D., that had great popularity through the ages.<sup>1</sup> There are several original manuscripts in Sanskrit that have been translated into various languages, and many Indian spiritual traditions claim it as an important text. According to Major A.W. Chadwick, “*Tripurā Rahasya* was considered by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi as one of the greatest works that expounded Advaita philosophy. He often quoted from it and regretted that it was not available in English. As a consequence Sri Munagala Venkataramiah took up the work of translation in 1936 as another labour of love, adding just one more English translation to his already extensive store.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For approximate dates and other interesting observations, see the introduction to *La doctrine secrète de la Déesse Tripurā*, a translation with notes by Michel Hulin.

<sup>2</sup> *Tripurā Rahasya or The Mystery Beyond the Trinity*, translated by Munagala S. Venkataramiah, pp. v-vi. Other translations in English include *Tripurārahasyam: The Secret Beyond the Three Cities*, original text in Sanskrit with translation and notes by Samvid; *Śakti Sādhana: A Translation of the Tripurā Rahasya* by Pandit Rajmani Tiguniat; and *Tripurā-Rahasya: English Translation and a Comparative Study of the Process of Individuation* by A.U. Vasavada.

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006 after serving as a senior administrator in the arts and humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then *sādhana* has been her highest priority and greatest joy.

The manuscript exists in three sections or *khaṇḍa*-s. The first is ritualistic in nature, the second, which is most often translated, is dedicated to teaching, and the third, to date, is lost. The author is given as Hāritāyana, who relates the second section, composed of dialogues between his guru Dattātreyā and Paraśurāma, to the god Nārada. Throughout all three sections, Absolute Consciousness is represented in female form as Śrī Tripurā, the Mother who transcends three cities, variously interpreted but most often meaning the waking, dreaming and sleeping states.

The second section of *Tripurā Rahasya*, which concerns us here, is not dry polemic. In fact, it is a practical guide to self-realization told through stories and anecdotes that alternate with passages of lively spiritual discourse. Throughout the text, the symbol of a mirror that in every instance embodies the Oneness of Pure Consciousness, the only Reality there is, occurs at least seventy times, repeating like a familiar *leit-motif*, sometimes using the word ‘*darpaṇa*’ and an equal number of times using the word ‘*ādarśa*’.<sup>3</sup> ‘*Darpaṇa*’, from the verbal root ‘*drp*’, to be foolish, arrogant or proud, means causing vanity, a mirror. On the other hand, ‘*ādarśa*’, also meaning mirror, comes from ‘*drś*’, to see, look at, observe, behold, even to see by divine intuition.

Not surprisingly, the mirror first appears in the opening invocation to the second *khaṇḍa* as follows:

ॐ नमः कारणानन्दरूपिणी परचिन्मयी ।  
विराजते जगच्चित्रचित्रदर्पणरूपिणी ॥

om namaḥ kāraṇānanda-rūpiṇī paracinmayī |  
virājate jagaccitra-citra-darpaṇa-rūpiṇī ||

Salutations to Her, in essence the blissful Primal Cause  
consisting of Pure Consciousness.

She shines and, like a mirror, reflects  
this world of multiplicity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I am treating the mirror as both a symbol and a simile, which differs from a metaphor in that ‘like’ is explicitly stated. For an exhaustive treatment of figures of speech in Sanskrit, see *Croaking Frogs* by Les Morgan, pp.191-231.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter One, verse 1. All translations of Sanskrit verses are by the author in consultation with Marcia Solomon, a dedicated and inspiring Sanskrit teacher and scholar who resides in Boulder, Colorado.

The story of Hemalekhā and Hemachūḍa, which extends over seven chapters (Three through Ten) in *Tripurā Rahasya*, contains many uses of the mirror to illustrate key concepts that involve steps to self-realisation. The story is told by Dattātreyā in response to questions from Paraśurāma having learned about the glory of the Goddess. Paraśurāma asks how one gains the opportunity to hear about Her, why others don't know about Her, and why he was not interested in learning about Her before. Dattātreyā says association with the wise is the way to attain the highest good, and to illustrate that, he begins his narration.

Hemalekhā, a woman of great beauty, was the daughter of a celestial being and a king. Abandoned, she was raised by a great Sage living in a forest. Hemachūḍa, a prince, encountered her in the Sage's hermitage when his hunting party got lost. They fell in love and were immediately married.

Problems arose, however, when Hemachūḍa noticed that his wife was indifferent to the many pleasures of the kingdom. When she told him she was distracted by reflections on what is the greatest pleasure and the greatest pain, meaning what is the highest good, he was amused. However, his seemingly naive wife skillfully reasoned with him, then shocked him with a vividly descriptive story of a betrayed lover so that, beginning with sexual enjoyment, he began to understand the insipidity of objects and all worldly pleasures.

Once detachment (*vairāgya*) was gained with his wife's guidance, Hemachūḍa constantly practised inquiry (*vicāra*) and was liberated. Eventually the entire kingdom, through the teaching of a woman, became enlightened, including the animals that resided therein. Parrots in their cages praised Pure Consciousness, and Chapter Four ends with the following enchanting verses.

चितिरूपं स्वमात्मानं भजध्वं चेत्यवर्जितम् ।  
नास्ति चेत्यं चितेरन्यद् दर्पणप्रतिबिम्बवत् ॥

चितिश्रेत्यं चितिरहं चितिः सर्वं चराचरम् ।  
यतः सर्वं चितिमनु भाति सा तु स्वतन्त्रतः ॥

अतश्चितिं जनाः सर्वभासिनीं सर्वसंश्रयाम् ।  
भजध्वं भ्रान्तिमुत्सृज्य चितिमात्रसुदृष्टयः ॥

citi-rūpaṁ svam-ātmānaṁ bhajadhvaṁ cetya-varjitam |  
nāsti cetyaṁ citeranyad darpaṇa-pratibimbavat ||  
citiścetyaṁ citirahaṁ citiḥ sarvaṁ carācaram |  
yataḥ sarvaṁ citim-anu bhāti sā tu sva-tantrataḥ ||  
ataścitiṁ janāḥ sarva-bhāsinīm sarva-saṁśrayām |  
bhajadhvaṁ bhrāntim-utsṛjya citi-mātra-sudṛṣṭayaḥ ||

Delight in your own Self, which is Pure Consciousness  
in essence, bereft of anything perceivable.

There are no objects outside of Pure Consciousness,  
just as reflections do not exist outside a mirror.

Objects are Pure Consciousness, the perceiver too,  
and the aggregate of all created things.

Everything shines dependent on Pure Consciousness,  
but She is self-resplendent.

Therefore, O people, adore Pure Consciousness,  
illuminator and substratum of all.

Giving up delusion,  
focus one-pointedly on Pure Consciousness alone.<sup>5</sup>

These beautiful verses appear again at the close of Chapter Ten, when the story of Hemalekhā and Hemachūḍa finally ends. They are thus endowed with a special status and gravity, whatever the explanation for the repetition might be. Using a simple image, the mirror, they extol the Self and, at the same time, make it accessible. We are told there is absolutely nothing outside of the Self, the mirror, including the seemingly real reflections that are in it. All that is needed to realize the highest good is to turn our attention from the reflections and abide in the mirror. Constant repose in the resulting state is enlightenment. Since the Self is in the Heart of every being at all times, we can all, with proper instruction from a Sage and perseverance, discover it.

Many devotees are already familiar with *darpaṇa*, since it appears in the opening verse of Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya's hauntingly beautiful opening verse of the *Hymn to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti*.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter Four, verses, 99-101.

*May our obeisance be to the Primal guru Sri Dakshinamurthy, who, at the time of spiritual awakening, experiences directly (without the aid of any medium) his true form as one without a second even as a dreamer on waking up sees only himself but who, hitherto out of ignorance, perceived the world existing within (the mind) as if manifested without (or outside of him) like the reflected image of a city seen to exist within a mirror.<sup>6</sup>*

The third verse of Bhagavan's *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* emphasizes the Oneness of Pure Consciousness and uses the idea of a canvas or screen upon which the pictures, corresponding to reflections in a mirror, are displayed.

*Because the world is seen, we have to infer a common cause (a Lord) possessing unlimited powers to appear as the diversity. The pictures consisting of names and forms, the seer, the canvas, the light – all these are He Himself.<sup>7</sup>*

Bhagavan once remarked:

*The jñānī sees he is the Self and it is on that Self as the screen that the various cinema-pictures of what is called the world pass. He remains unaffected by the shadows which play on the surface of that screen.<sup>8</sup>*

Returning to the story, Paraśurāma begged Dattātreya for more details about Hemachūḍa's path to enlightenment, and Dattātreya obliged, backing up the narrative and relaunching the tale. He begins by stating that detachment (*vairāgya*) did not at first serve Hemachūḍa well. He became restless and questioned his wife further. She, noting with pleasure signs of progress from obvious grace from the Goddess, told him a story of her own life in the form of an extended allegory, a literary device in which meaning is represented symbolically. Not understanding the significance of it nor its relevance to his own situation, he was greatly frustrated. That led Hemalekhā to tell him about the importance of faith (*śraddhā*) and the dangers of futile

<sup>6</sup> Kanakammal, T.R., *Commentary on Anuvadā Nūnmālai*, p. 185 (paraphrase of Bhagavan's Tamil translation from Sanskrit).

<sup>7</sup> Translation by S.S. Cohen.

<sup>8</sup> Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-45.

polemics. Sound reasoning (*sattarka*), grounded in the scriptures, leads to the conviction that a Supreme Consciousness exists, and devoted worship of It is the first step to the highest good.

Beginning to place faith in his own wife, who was not what he thought she was, he asked her where faith should be placed. With so many different deities and so many conflicting doctrines, how to choose the right one worthy of devotion? Hemalekhā responded with reasoning about the impossibility of a Creator having any body at all. Otherwise, how could He, who creates from absolute freedom of Will, be Supreme, and how could He be the same in all religions regardless of form?

The following verses make the point that differences, including notions of superiority or inferiority among deities, cannot exist because the world is not separate from Absolute Consciousness where there are no differences. They are in the mind only. So worshipping the Supreme Being without form is preferable.

आदर्शनगरप्रख्यं जगदेतच्चराचरम् ।

तद्रूपैकत्वतस्तत्र नोत्तमाधमभावना ॥

अपरे तु स्वरूपे हि कल्पितं मुख्यतादि हि ।

तस्मात् प्राज्ञ उपासीत परं रूपं हि निष्कलम् ॥

ādarśa-nagara-prakhyam jagadetaccarācaram |

tadrūpaikatvatatastatra nottamādhama-bhāvanā ||

apare tu sva-rūpe hi kalpitaṁ mukhyatādi hi |

tasmāt prājña upāsīta param rūpaṁ hi niṣkalam ||

This world of living and lifeless entities

is like a city in a mirror.

In this case, due to the Oneness of its nature,

the conception of higher and lower does not exist.

But when not in one's own true state,

superiority and such are only imagined.

Therefore, let the wise one be devoted to

the highest essence, alone without distinctions.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, formless worship is in most cases not possible. Fortunately for us, the Chapter ends on a reassuring note. If one

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter Seven, verses 92 and 93.



worships God in the concrete form that is most comfortable and with an attitude of absolute desirelessness, in time one will reach the goal. A dialogue between Bhagavan and a devotee goes as follows:

*D: Has God a form? M: Who says so? D: Well, if God has no form is it proper to worship idols? M: Leave God alone because He is unknown. What about you? Have you a form? D: Yes, I am this and so and so. M: So then, you are a man with limbs, about three and a half cubits high, with beard, etc. Is it so? D: Certainly. M: Then do you find yourself so in deep sleep? D: After waking I perceive that I was asleep. Therefore by inference I remained thus in deep sleep also. M: If you are the body why do they bury the corpse after death? The body must refuse to be buried. D: No, I am the subtle jīva within the gross body. M: So you see that you are really formless, but you are at present identifying yourself with the body. So long as you are formful why should you not worship the formless God as being formful? The questioner was baffled and perplexed.<sup>10</sup>*

Elsewhere, Bhagavan says:

*The only thing to know is that there is an entity who is in all these forms, but who is not these forms. We see the One in the many. We see the One as many, the Formless in the forms.<sup>11</sup>* ▲

(To be continued)

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<sup>10</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§121.

<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, 2-5-46 Morning.



# Sri Mahaswami

## The Sage with Eyes of Light

### Part Six

SERGE DEMETRIAN

*We continue the series of extracts from a manuscript titled Śrī Mahāswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhātipati Jagadguru Śrī Sañkarācārya, Śrī Candrasekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.*

Kārvetinagar, Thursday 2nd September 1971

#### **The Universal pūjā**

After a difficult afternoon with setbacks and smaller health problems, I witnessed once again on this *ekādashī* night, one of the universal *pūjā*-s of Śrī Mahāswami.

It was 9 pm and Swāmijī, while sitting outside his hut, was about to finish one of his long series of talks, three hours in length this time, with different visitors.

Generally, as much as my elementary knowledge of the Tamil language permits me to understand, Śrī Mahāswami, while talking on various subjects with the people, seems not to deal with or demonstrate precise ideas. One would say that he instructs them – without their knowledge – making use of the words as a pretext to pass on to them,

while they are captivated by his speech, what is beyond the words. In this way, their harmful tendencies get negated in the net of his words.

I was very near to him and I felt how the vibrations of his voice removed certain foreign substances that weighed down my mind and my body. Once I was receptive and able to receive more, Śrī Mahāswami responded without haste. He was never in a hurry, meaning he was always in the right position to perfectly utilise his time. He came down the some fifteen stairs of the Lotus Pond and stopped at the last one where he sat down on a small mat of dried herbs, facing east, towards the water. The shadow of a rather tall flame of the oil night-lamp danced on his ochre-orange cloth. As always, when he wanted to instruct me, he had removed, mentally, the other participants on his right side, which was where I was standing, at five metres from him, also on the last stair before the water's edge. He took care to be in the full light. I observed at regular intervals how brilliant his right eye was as he repeated his invocations. His abundant hair and the beard formed a white halo round his fine and energetic face.

For a few minutes Śrī Mahāswami sat straight looking ahead to the other side of the reservoir, as if he was waiting for something to appear from the surface of the water or beyond. Quickly, the swarms of insects that flew about every night concealed themselves in the bushes that encircled the reservoir. Deprived of their usual prey, the dragonflies stopped their haphazard movements and sheltered in the burgeoning leaves of the lotuses. The bats retired to the tall tree behind the hermitage where they had their nests, and ceased cheeping. The fish and toads did not plop in the water and the surface of the reservoir became calm and even, like a sheet of glossy, black paper, which became the floor of an immense stage with the ceiling decorated by stars. Nature seemed to wait. One had the feeling that in the growing obscurity of evening, eyes approached furtively and thronged the high terraces of an unseen amphitheatre above the crests of the trees on the reservoir's banks. Those eyes, thousands of pairs, were riveted on the single point of light, Śrī Mahāswami.

Everything started discreetly with a few ritual movements for the purification of the body and of the danda, in accordance with the tradition; the Purity in itself, is it still in need of purification? A short prayer and suddenly Śrī Mahāswami united his palms and

fingers, and, arms stretched, he directed them successively towards all the directions of the space — there are ten in the Hindu tradition. He energetically raised and lowered his hands, while his head bent in the same direction where his hands moved. One would have said that from all directions he called acquaintances, invited some guests, I suppose, seen only by him, and requested them to sit near-by. After some time, the space all around, the entire stage of the lake, became so charged, so dense that it was hard to breathe: everywhere there was ‘someone’.

The time had now come to tell why they have been convened. Opening his palms, he started discussing with every one through gestures. With his hands he encircled a spot in the space as if he was caressing a child and enquired if he was well. He moved to another near-by. He jumped to a third one, farther away, only to return to the first one to whom it was necessary to convey a word. After having received in this way tens and hundreds of spirits, seen only by him, his gestures became larger and more expressive. He seemed to tell them why they have been summoned. Some did not understand: he had to repeat. Some needed clarifications. Finally, all were informed what it was all about.

Now the discussion became general. The long and fine fingers of Śrī Mahāswami, with the talent of an accomplished mime made everybody talk, without a word.

“Louder, we do not hear you.”

“And you?” He seemed to say while turning to the other side of the assembly, “Wait for your turn.”

“What about that group on the back, what is your opinion? ... Oh yes and if you clarify your statement?”

He seemed to conduct an immense symphonic orchestra from a score known only by him. He was preparing the final fortissimo.

Now Śrī Mahāswami suddenly started giving orders. A rapid burst of energetic movements which were deprived of everything that could be identified as external signs of prayer. They were precise gestures to catch an object seen only by him, but whose reality was unquestionable. He spread out his arms in different places; then he gave mute explanations, with a stretched finger, here and there. From time to time, he showed movements of appeasement and further

clarification to those who needed them. It seemed to me as if from his slender fingers shot flashes of mute lightning bolts, while from his white palm trickled an elixir received with veneration by the entire Nature gathered in awe on the concentric terraces of the amphitheatre whose last steps lost themselves somewhere towards the stars. Thousands and thousands of eyes were captivated by the one luminous centre in this Creation. The rather strong flame of the oil night lamp tried in vain to exceed Śrī Mahāswami. It was really he who lent his own lustre to the wick. Covered as he was by his ochre-orange cloth that he often readjusted back on his head with energetic movements, he looked like a triangle of almost solidified light.

I stared at him along with those who had also received from him the power to see. He was the origin of all forces. He had abandoned for a while the aspect of a wandering monk under which he screens himself every day in order not to frighten us, in order not to crush us. He had assumed his position of Master, and presided over the orders as the Emperor that he was.

For a certain moment, Śrī Mahāswami remained quiet: the sole centre of thousands of focused eyes. I continued looking at him as did all who stood around, when I clearly heard him... singing: a simple melody, a sort of short appeal he repeated three times, with his 'true voice', which seemed to me an undulating tendril of thick light, like the steady or slow-moving flashes which sometimes gush out of his eyes.

And the created beings listened, both the moving and the non-moving. They all knew, up to the last one, that without Him, deprived of His Presence, of His Word, they would crumble and descend into the formless chaos out of which they had been brought to life solely by His will.

After some time, he looked as if he was satisfied, as if his orders were clear to everyone.

However, before sending away those he had invited, there was one last procedure that had to be accomplished. He joined once again his hands, with fingers and palms even tighter this time. Arms stretched, he resumed large circles towards all the directions of the space. The right ones were not equal to the left ones: He stressed the right side where I was standing, frozen, hands in añjali. It was doubtless that he intended to include in the interior of the circles a certain entity



residing in ‘this one’ called me. This entity, which was still not free and sufficiently pure, was being progressively detached by the insistent and very precise movements. Suddenly, I had the clear feeling that it was the best of myself that was being separated from the surroundings. I understood this from the circles in which I was in all evidence included, and mostly by the fact that, when I was drawn in, I felt at my left some kind of blade that cut me off from the rest of the world. When he had finished, I was more HE than I was ME. In my heart there opened by itself a sort of diamond-like vertical trace of the size of a span. He had surely included me in his plans and had placed me in a definite place: for now, I had to witness what was to follow.

The moment has come when all those called by him, the immense, invisible audience who were waiting in silence, should be honoured. Looking always at his invitees, he gathered, one after another, from four or five bowls of coconut bark, the offering of the service: red kum-kum powder, grey vibhūti powder, multicoloured flower petals, and grains of white rice. Without mixing them, he left them fall as a fine rain into the lake, which seemed to reverentially receive them.

The last act was approaching. Śrī Mahāswami pierced me with his eyes several times, sometimes I could perceive a black lightning, sometimes a firefly. Then he turned towards north – I saw him from the back – and started meditating. My body, which could do almost nothing by itself was ready to receive his Presence, and this seemed to have been, in what ‘I’ was concerned with, the aim of the four last hours. Śrī Mahāswami had destroyed totally and with so much mastery the ‘I’ feeling, that now he had entirely taken up residency in my flesh. He had completely replaced me with himself in what I was. By now, he existed in two bodies: his and mine. The result was that I felt changed in the exquisite, essential core of all the senses, crushed with happiness. Finally one had escaped from suffering... one is free, free, Free... one is oneself; one is Śrī Mahāswami, one is the All. How to describe it?

Then the luminous trace of ‘my’ heart became quickly stronger and more powerful, replacing everything – Swāmijī and myself – and then evolved into a pillar of white bluish ether of an indescribable brilliance: diamond powder that changed by itself into a flame without smoke and heat. I heard nothing anymore, except a sound, which



could be ‘felt’ and ‘seen’ in some way, rather than heard – a fine, acute and continuous note. If previously I could still mentally pronounce a divine name or *Omkara*, now there was nobody there who could utter anything. Who would pronounce what? Existence-in-itself has no need to enunciate its name as it exists, alone... to Infinity...

The happiness that accompanied the realisation of the Existence-in-itself is the Felicity (*ananda*). Who would have the courage to describe in words the small happiness’ of daily life? The more so in daring to describe in words Felicity itself!

Then it was the paroxysm: the last feeble traces of an old, almost forgotten life were ready to break off and disappear... Only for the Existence to exist in its totality...

But it was destined that it should not be so. An inexorable Will had decided otherwise...

Little by little, the Infinite of diamond-like white-bluish light became yellowish. The image of Śrī Mahāswami who inhabited both bodies reappeared and along with it the ‘I’ feeling gushed forth from some corner. Then there appeared, by their own volition, as if to console me somehow, a series of divine names and a verse from an *Upanishad*:

There is no joy but in the Infinite; there is no joy in the limited.

The joy is Infinite, only one should have  
the will to know the Infinite.

I want, oh Master, to know the Infinite.<sup>1</sup>

My stiff body swayed a little; the eyes which were closed until then, were the only organs to slowly stir; the other functions seemed to be still asleep. The ‘I’ perceived once again the sitting human form of Śrī Mahāswami: an orange purple pyramid of condensed light. Over his dress there played the little flame of the oil night-lamp, as if it was drawing its force from an elder kindred flame.

After a while, Śrī Mahāswami stood up. He grasped his *danda* with both hands as his stern face turned once again towards east, and addressed the beings of the darkness crowded on the invisible terraces, which had increased up towards the stars as the night wore on. He emphasised his orders by circles and other figures in the ten

<sup>1</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VII.23.1.

directions of the space. Then he upstretched both arms and traced large farewell signs above and in front of his head. I did not hear nor did I see anything, but I observed how the flame of the oil night-lamp, which until then was peacefully vertical, dangerously flickered at the end of its wick, and bowed towards west and towards the steps of the reservoir. It was as if it were pushed by the current of a commotion on the lake. The surface of the water, unruffled until then, covered itself with ripples.

My heart was full of azure sparkles as I stood transfixed for a few minutes. Then the *ātman* took once again charge of this arrangement of organs. Instead of looking towards its own interior light, it directed its forces towards the external. It poured itself out and flew again through the channels of the senses. In the language of ordinary men, I started living again; in the language of the saints, I was dying...

Śrī Mahāswami understood what happened in me; he also knew that he had still to protect his devotee: the nervous system, the heart of flesh, all the organism composed of tissues and thoughts waited to be purified and strengthened. Otherwise, the molten gold of his blessing could destroy forever the frail structures insufficiently inured to the stress of a higher, more subtle and intense reality. He acts often this way, as the protector. That is why, in his presence, I never come back to the so-called ‘normality’ with a headache or giddiness. There are also no more of those pernicious excitations of the senses where the over-activity of the mind could lead to physical or verbal drifts that are bereft of the mark of true spirituality.

Śrī Mahāswami sat once again on the stairs of the reservoir and started one of his long discussions with different visitors. He has nothing to prove; I think that everything he says is a secret teaching, expressed solely by the vibration of his voice. As for me, I ‘feel’ his voice in the heart and I bear witness for this. Still, from time to time, he made a remark, or some suggestion, or gave counsel that was understood by those sensitive enough to understand it. Better, by those to whom he had given the capacity to realize.

Finally, he walked up towards the hut while still talking. I surmised that he will enter the hut and so I left for my residence. I quickly ate my dinner of milk and rice flakes and afterward came back to the Lotus Pond with my bedding for the night: a local rather thin mat

weaved of dried plant sheaths to protect against the humidity on the ground, a folded woollen blanket as mattress and a cotton white bed sheet long enough to be drawn over the head by way of a mosquito net. My Indian bag was the pillow as well as being a security against theft. I also took my hurricane lamp, which was to be placed in front of my head as to scare the stray dogs.

Upon my return to the Pond I observed that Śrī Mahāswami had not yet retired. Sitting in the hut, on the bed made of coconut woven cords, he spoke to four or five persons. I stood at two or three metres distance from him, at the threshold of the open door, as I never entered the room out of respect for the traditional rules. I contemplated him without hindrances from 11 pm. to 1 am. My rather limited knowledge of literary Tamil and his slight dialect stopped me from being distracted by the conversation that, by the way, seemed quite interesting. Śrī Mahāswami possesses a consummate art, among several others, of leading a play of questions and responses. Often he makes the listeners laugh uproariously while he never laughs with full voice. He smiles only; this remarkably brightens up his face, which usually is attentive, preoccupied and even severe. So, I preferred to observe him while he held his listeners spellbound and who did not have the time to ask themselves why he accepted me to be so near to him.

Today, as I had a memorable experience, I conserved my energy, and this seemed to be also his intention. So, no supplementary meditation; I contented myself with ‘drinking’ his eyes and his entire being. The more I study him the more he becomes for me a source of wonder. Every point of his body vibrates: nothing is left to chance, nothing is unrefined. He can accomplish everything and at any moment. From his bed he showed me several times his foot, his divine foot, as the foot of God, a crystal boat, which, according to the utterances of the poets inspired by the Truth, leads the one who entrusts everything to Him, to the Infinite. ▲

*(To be continued)*



# The Significance of Kartikai Deepam

M.R. KODHANDRAM

**B**hagavan has composed the following Tamil verse to explain the significance of the Kartikai Deepam that is lit on the Arunachala Hill every year. The stanza is as follows:

இத்தனுவே நானாம் எனுமதியை நீத்தப்  
புத்தி யிதயத்தே பொருந்தியக நோக்கால்  
அத்துவித மாமெய் யகச்சுடர்காண் கைபூ  
மத்திஎனும் அண்ணா மலைச்சுடர்காண் மெய்யே.

Ittanuvē nānām enu-madiyai nīttap  
buddhi idayattē porundi-aga nōkkāl  
adduvita mā-mey agac-chuḍar-kāṇ gai-bhū  
maddi-yenum Aṇṇā malaicchuḍar-kāṇ meyyē.

## Meaning

The true significance of seeing the flame (Kartikai Deepam) on Annamalai, which is the Heart centre of the world, is realising the

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Light of the Real Self that is one without a second, after discarding the notion ‘I am this body’ and making the mind abide in the Heart by attending to the source of the mind (through Self-enquiry and meditation).

Thus, Bhagavan is teaching us that Arunachala is nothing but the Self which is one without a second. It means, the same Self exists in all. And we can realise our Self by giving up our wrong identification with the body or the “I am the body” idea and diving deep inside towards the source of the mind, which is the Heart. Giving up the “I am the body” idea or *dehatma buddhi* helps us to give up our attachment to the body. And diving inside is done through Self-enquiry. It is done by asking the questions “Who am I?” and “Wherefrom does this mind arise in me”.

After asking these questions, if we pray to Bhagavan to help us, we will be able to locate the Source within us by his Grace. The Heart centre is the source of the mind. If we focus the mind steadily on this point, the mind will descend along the *Paranadi* which connects the head to the Heart, and reach the Heart in due course. When it reaches the Heart, it will subside, thus revealing the real Self that dwells in the Heart. This Source (namely the Heart) is the same place that the mind retires to daily during deep sleep. But this happens unconsciously during sleep due to Grace. What we do in sleep, we have to learn to do in the wakeful state consciously in order to make the happiness we got during sleep a permanent one, so that we can enjoy it even in the wakeful state. This is the *sādhana* we have to practise. Thus, both Self-enquiry and sustained meditation (*dhyāna*) are required to achieve success in our efforts.

For the sake of devotees, Lord Arunachala has manifested as this Hill, so that people can see Him and be benefitted. The Self cannot be seen by the physical eyes as it is not an object but the subject or substratum of all. Therefore, whatever we know about the Self is only what we have read in books or heard from others. It is only a theoretical knowledge. Hence for us devotees to benefit, Lord Arunachala, out of His compassion, has manifested in a gross form so that we can understand His nature. Though He appears here as a rocky mountain, He is essentially only the Self. He is the fire of knowledge which destroys the darkness of ignorance. He is a fire that emits no

heat because He is the fire of *jñāna* or *jñāna-agni*. Lord Arunachala/the Self does not, like a regular fire, burn objects that are close by as He/It is cool in nature. The nature of Lord Arunachala/the Hill is pure bliss and hence it brings only peace and happiness in all those who think of it.

All the four great Saivite saints Manikkavasagar, Sundaramurti, Tirunavukkarasar and Jnanasambandhar have sung songs in praise of Arunachala. In one verse which Bhagavan often quoted, Jnanasambandhar describes this hill as *Jnanattiraḷ* or a dense mass of Jnana. And Sundaramurti says, in one of his songs, “O Annamalai, you can be known only by those who seek thee giving up attachment to their body.” In *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, stanza 19, Bhagavan says that Arunachala shines in the form of the Guru who destroys all our faults and makes us virtuous.

Thus, Arunachala appears in the form of a Guru to worthy devotees to guide them on the spiritual path, so that they may return to Him and, dissolving in Him, bring an end to their unending cycle of reincarnations. As the *Sadguru* of all those who see the Hill or think of the Hill, Arunachala pushes the mind inwards. And from within, where the Lord exists as the Self, He exerts a pull on the mind so that we may reach Him and be united with Him. This is the Grace of Lord Arunachala. Thus He helps his devotees both from without and from within.

The Jyoti or flame which is lit on the peak of the Hill on Kartikai Deepam Day is meant to indicate its true nature, which is Pure Consciousness/Awareness. Thus, we are taught, through an annual ritual, that the Arunachala Hill is not just a rocky mountain. This is only its outer shell. In actuality the Hill is a manifestation of the Supreme Self that exists in all of us, but which cannot be seen as an object or comprehended easily by anyone.

The proof about the Hill’s true nature as Pure Consciousness (*cit*) or Perfect Knowledge (*jñāna*) can only be experienced intuitively. I have my personal experience of the Hill. On the Hill, I get clarity on anything I ponder. For *Tiruppavai* and other books that I have written, I used to find answers to doubts and also decode the hidden meanings of the stanzas by pondering over them on the Hill after praying to Lord Arunachala. Even now, whenever I have to write answers to

questions, if I write on the Hill, it flows like magic. Almost every day I ponder over some thing or the other on the Hill and gain clarity. Even Bhagavan says that he got guidance from Lord Arunachala while living on the hill. That's why Bhagavan considered Lord Arunachala to be his Guru. Therefore, this Hill is not just a hill, it is a manifestation of Shiva himself, who exists as the fire of knowledge (*jñāna*). This is symbolised by the Deepam Beacon that is lit every year on the day of Kartikai Pournami (the full moon day of the month of Kartikai). It was on this day that Lord Shiva manifested himself as a  *jyoti*  (sacred light) to Parvati when she, after long separation, longed and pined to see him. She had been doing  *tapasya*  (penance) here in Tiruvannamalai in order to atone for a fault and to become, once more, reunited with her consort, Lord Shiva/Arunachala.

Earlier, Lord Shiva had appeared as a column of effulgent Light in order to settle a dispute between the gods Brahma and Vishnu. They had been arguing as to who was superior. Subsequently, the two gods set out to find the top and bottom of the effulgence but failed badly in their efforts. Thus their pride was humbled and they surrendered to Lord Shiva and sought refuge in him. As the fiery effulgence of Lord Shiva was too fierce to bear, they requested the Lord to tone down his brightness so that he could become easily approachable by all.

Thus, the column of effulgence became the Arunachala Hill, with a subdued, ordinary appearance, as an act of Grace by Lord Arunachala for the welfare and protection of the world. Brahma and Vishnu prayed to Shiva that his true effulgence should be revealed once a year, for the welfare of the world, in the month of Kartikai, on the evening of the full moon. This is the significance of the lighting of the Deepam Beacon on the top of Arunachala Hill. The true significance of this story of Brahma and Vishnu, who failed to encompass the limits of Shiva's column of light, is that the real Self, which exists within the Heart, cannot be reached by the intellect and the ego-mind. The ego has to be first subdued.

Just as the light on the top of the Hill signifies the true nature of Arunachala as Being-Consciousness, so too, the true nature of all living beings is this Pure Consciousness. Just as we have realised this truth about the significance of Arunachala Hill, we have to realise our



true nature by diving deep within us towards our Heart wherein dwells the effulgent Self. This is the supreme goal of life for all.

### **Why is the Deepam lit on the day of Kartikai Pournami?**

Kartikai Pournami is the most powerful Pournami (full moon day) of the whole year. That is why it is able to draw so many lakhs of people on this day. Therefore, for the benefit of all, the significance of the Hill is being revealed here so that all can see and learn the truth about Arunachala Hill and be blessed in life. By doing *girivalam* (circumambulation) on this most sacred day, our minds get purified, our understanding and *bhakti* (loving devotion to God) get strengthened and we will be able to walk the right path in life that will lead us to the Self within and end being trapped in samsara.

There is yet another reason why the sacred fire on the Hill is lit during this time of the year. The Deepam Beacon burns continuously for 11 days and nights. It is so bright that it is visible even from a very long distance. The fire produces heat, which nourishes the medicinal herbs that grow nearby on the Hill. They would grow well due to the monsoon. As the Beacon's fire is burning continuously, the heat it produces causes the medicinal herbs growing nearby to release certain medicinal vapours into the atmosphere, which destroy the harmful bacteria that are normally present during this time.

We now understand that though Arunachala appears as a Hill, in reality, it is Lord Shiva himself who is the Consciousness that is one without a second. That is the true nature of this Hill. This is the significance of lighting the Kartikai Deepam, to reveal the light of the Self. If we now enquire into our own nature based on this, we will realise that though we appear as human bodies, we are actually the Consciousness that dwells in the transcendent Heart, just as Arunachala is the heart centre of the whole world.

Thus, whenever we look at Arunachala Hill, we are only looking at our own Self, which is hard to perceive. By looking at Arunachala Hill, our minds will be drawn within towards the Self in the Heart. Thus, by seeing or even thinking of Arunachala, our minds will be effortlessly introverted. Usually, when we look at the world, our minds are externalised. It is very difficult to internalise the mind. But when we look at Arunachala, our minds will be internalised automatically.

That is why it is so easy to do *sādhana* (spiritual practice) in this place. So many saints and sages have done *tapasya* (penance) here from time immemorial. Even today many saints are here doing their *sādhana* to realise the Self. The most beautiful aspect of worshipping Lord Arunachala-as-the-Hill is that He grants us the power of enquiry (investigation, *vicāra*) by which we can internalise our minds and overcome all the *vāsanā-s* (mental formations; habitual tendencies) of our ego that block our spiritual journey.

In our day to day lives, whenever we are affected by situations and we react negatively, if we think of Lord Arunachala/Arunachala Hill or Bhagavan, who is one with Him, we will be able to calm our minds quickly. Thereafter, if we enquire in all earnestness, we will be able to understand where we went wrong and thus correct our faults. In this manner, we will be able to cut off the ego that rises as various negative thoughts and emotions at its root, and make our minds pure and perfect. This is the way to progress on the spiritual path. Finally, we will be able to do the *ātma-vicāra* (Self enquiry) and reach our Heart and unite the mind with the Self. This is Self-Realisation, which will liberate us from the cycle of repeated births and deaths. This is the supreme goal of life to be attained by all! Thus, Arunachala helps all His devotees to reach Him and to never come back to *samsāra* again. May we all worship Arunachala and Bhagavan and follow Bhagavan's teachings and progress in life and be happy always. May Arunachala and Bhagavan bless our efforts and grant us their Grace!

▲

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Lalithambikaa,*  
your tender sport, Goddess, is  
all these worlds and lives;  
redeem us, merciful mother,  
save us in your hymns of light.

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.

# Consciousness

S. RAM MOHAN

## Introduction

‘What is Real?’ is the question that is engaging the human mind from time immemorial. Vedanta says that ‘*bhūma*’ (Supreme Consciousness) alone is real and is infinite.

The concept of Consciousness has been succinctly dealt with in the *Upaniṣad*-s. Sankara, in his commentary on *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* observes, “The function of the *Upaniṣad*-s is to emphasize the identity between *jīva*, the limited self and the True Self or Consciousness. The wrong identification of self as Consciousness has arisen due to *avidyā*. Never indeed do the *Upaniṣad*-s objectify the Self. Then, what is their function? It is answered that it gives rise to the *vr̥itti* which has for its content the identity of the Self with consciousness element of the *jīva* – the conscious element which is escalated or drawn out from the mind to which it is ligatured. The *vr̥itti* illuminated by the reflection of Consciousness in it, removes the difference of the ‘known’, the ‘knower’ and ‘knowledge’ that are imagined through *avidyā*.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adi Sankara commentary on *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Karika* 2.32.

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There arises from it this finite consciousness taking on an *upadhi* (limiting adjunct). This is *ābhāsa* or reflection. Our aim is to merge this individual consciousness into the Supreme One.<sup>2</sup> ‘*Bhuma*’ is the Supreme Consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Sri Ramana Maharshi cautions that ‘*vṛitti*’ (thought) is often mistaken for consciousness. While Self-realisation is *akhandākāra vṛitti* (unbroken experience), ‘*vṛitti*’ is only a phenomenon and operates at the level of ‘*ābhāsa*’ (reflected consciousness). *Vṛitti* is qualified, directed consciousness, or undivided consciousness broken by cognition of thoughts, senses, etc. It is the function of the mind, whereas the continuous consciousness (*akhandākāra*) transcends the mind. This is the natural primal state of the *jñāni*, which ‘asserts’ itself when relative consciousness subsides.<sup>4</sup>

True knowledge lies beyond relative knowledge and ignorance. It is not in the shape of ‘*vṛitti*’. There are no subject and object in it. ‘*Vṛitti*’ belongs to the *rajasic* (active mind) not the *sattvic* mind (mind in repose), which is free from it. The *sattvic* is the witness of the *rajasic*. No doubt true consciousness transcends mind, but still it is called *sattvic* mind because the knowledge of being conscious is the function of *ābhāsa* (reflected consciousness). Mind only is the *ābhāsa*. Such knowledge implies a mind but the mind itself is the inspiration for this insight. Therefore it is called the *sattvic* mind.

Another important aspect of the Indian view of consciousness has to be considered. Our *rishis*, after keen observation have suggested that consciousness is a varying entity at different times and in different individuals and beings. They have classified consciousness into four states: i. Aware State (*jāgrata*); ii. Dream State (*svapna*); iii. Deep Sleep State (*suṣupti*); iv. The Fourth State (*turīya avasthā*).

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§68.

<sup>3</sup> *yatra naanyat pasyati yatra naanyat srnoti sa bhuma. Chāndogya Upaniṣad* by Swami Krishnananda. Chapter Three: ‘Sanatkumara’s Instructions on *Bhuma-Vidyā*’. Section 24. “Do you want to know what Completeness (*bhuma*) is? And do you want to know what finitude is? Here is the definition,” says Sanatkumara. “Where one sees nothing except one’s own Self, where one hears nothing except one’s own Self, where one understands nothing except one’s own Self, that is *Bhuma*, the Absolute; and where one sees something outside oneself, where one hears something outside oneself, where one understands or thinks something outside oneself, that is the finite.”

<sup>4</sup> Op.cit., *Talks*, Talk§68.

Many philosophical and metaphysical comments have been raised and answered in India from ancient times while discussing the relationship of the individual with the first three states (wakefulness, dream and deep sleep) of consciousness. Where are the faculties of *cetana*, *cittam*, *buddhi* and *ahankāra* (Consciousness, mind, intellect and 'I'ness) during sleeping and dreaming? Where is the I feeling or the doer (*kartā*) feeling during these states? What provides the continuity when you wake up after a dream or sleep?

The great philosophers of India have based their arguments on the relationship of the states of consciousness to the individual to prove the existence of the *ātma* or the soul. According to Indian thought, a continuous thread of consciousness exists through all the three states.

There is only one state, that of consciousness or awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream and sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will always exist. The 'I' or existence that alone persists in all the three states is real. The other three are not real and so it is not possible to say they have such and such a degree of reality.

We may roughly put it like this. Existence or consciousness is the only reality. Consciousness plus waking, we call waking. Consciousness plus sleep, we call sleep. Consciousness plus dream, we call dream. Consciousness is the screen on which all the pictures come and go. The screen is real, the pictures are mere shadows on it. Because by long habit we have been regarding these three states as real, we call the state of mere awareness or consciousness as the fourth. There is however no fourth state, but only one state.<sup>5</sup>

There is no difference between dream and the waking state except that the dream is short and the waking long. Both are the result of the mind. Because the waking state is long, we imagine that it is our real state. But, as a matter of fact, our real state is *turīya* or the fourth state which is always as it is and knows nothing of the three states of waking, dream or sleep. Because we call these three *avasthā* (states), we call the fourth state also *turīya avasthā*. But it is not

<sup>5</sup> Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11-1-1946 Afternoon.

an *avasthā*, but the real and natural state of the Self. When this is realised, we know it is not a *turiya* or fourth state, for a fourth state is only relative, but *turiyatita*, the transcendent state.<sup>6</sup>

To Dr. G. H. Mees, Bhagavan replied on the theme thus: “*Samādhi* is one’s natural state. It is the undercurrent in all the three states. This – that is ‘I’ – is not in those states but those states are in ‘It’. If we get *samadhi* in our waking state, that will persist in deep sleep also. The distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness belongs to the reality of mind, which is transcended by the state of the ‘Real Self’.”<sup>7</sup>

Bhagavan instructs us that we have to hold on to the ‘I’ thought and to probe its source. Then it will disappear as a phantom. What remains is the real ‘I’. That is the Self. To focus on the thought ‘I am Brahman’ is an aid to concentration as it keeps out other thoughts.

See, whose is that thought. It will be found to be from the ‘I’. Wherefrom is the ‘I’ thought? Probe into it. The ‘I’ thought will vanish. The Supreme Self will shine forth of itself. No further effort is needed.<sup>8</sup>

Now you say you were unconscious in sleep and self-conscious in the wakeful state. Which is the Reality? The Reality must be continuous and eternal. Neither the unconsciousness nor the self-consciousness of the present is the Reality. But you admit your existence all through. The pure Being is the reality. The others are mere associations. The pure Being cannot be otherwise than consciousness. Otherwise you cannot say that you exist. Therefore consciousness is the reality. When that consciousness is associated with *upādi-s* you speak of self-consciousness, unconsciousness, sub-consciousness, super-consciousness, human consciousness, dog-consciousness, tree-consciousness and so on. The unaltered common factor in all of them is consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

Consciousness is always Self-consciousness. If you are conscious of anything you are essentially conscious of yourself. Un-self-conscious existence is a contradiction in terms. It is no existence at

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<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. *Talks*, Talk§617.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid *Talks*, Talk§136.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid *Talks*, Talk§202.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid *Talks*, Talk§591.

all. It is merely attributed existence, whereas true existence, the *sat* is not an attribute, it is the substance itself. It is the *vastu* (reality). Reality is therefore, known as *sat-cit*, being-consciousness, and never merely the one to the exclusion of the other. The world neither exists by itself nor is it conscious of its existence. How then can you say that such a world is real?

Erwin Schrodinger in the Epilogue of his *What is Life?* concerning mind, states, “Consciousness is never experienced in the plural, only in the singular.”

Sri Ramana points out that:

All scriptures are only for the purpose of investigating if there are two consciousness. Everyone’s experience proves the existence of only one consciousness. Can that one divide itself into two? Is any division felt in the Self? Awaking from sleep one finds oneself the same in the wakeful as well as in the sleep states. That is the experience of each one. The difference lies in the seeking, in the outlook. Because you imagine that you are the seer separate from the experience, this difference arises. Experience shows that your being is the same all through.<sup>10</sup>

Bhagavan also explained the concept of ‘*Mahat*’ as “the projected light from Absolute consciousness.” Just as a seed swells up before sprouting and then sprouts and grows, so also the Absolute Consciousness projects light, manifests as the ego and grows up as the body and the universe.<sup>11</sup>

According to Sri Ramana, Cosmic Consciousness is the same as Absolute Consciousness. It exists before the birth of the ego and the universe. It comprises them all. Just as all the pictures thrown on the screen are visible by the light projected from a spot, so also the body and the other objects are all visible in that reflected consciousness. It is, therefore, also cosmic consciousness. Again, (in the microcosm) the body and all other objects are all contained in the brain. The impressions in the brain become manifest as the body and the worlds. Because the ego identifies itself with limitations, the body is considered itself with limitations, the body is considered separate and the world separate.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., *Talks*, Talk§199.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., *Talks*, Talk§177.

The undifferentiated consciousness of pure being is the Heart or *hridayam*, which is what you really are. From the Heart arises the ‘I am’-ness as the primary datum of one’s experience. By itself it is completely pure (*śuddha-sattva*) in character. It is in this form of pristine purity (*śuddha-sattva-svarūpa*), uncontaminated by *rajas* and *tamas* (activity and inertia), that the ‘I’ appears to subsist in the *jñāni*.

When the mind perishes in the supreme consciousness of one’s own Self, know that all the various powers beginning with the power of liking (and including the power of doing and the power of knowing) will entirely disappear, being found to be an imagination appearing in one’s own form of consciousness. The impure mind which functions as thinking and forgetting is *samsāra*, which is the cycle of birth and death. The real ‘I’ in which the activity of thinking and forgetting has perished, alone is the pure liberation. It is devoid of *pramāda*, (forgetfulness of Self) which is the cause of birth and death.<sup>12</sup>

The truth of oneself alone is worthy to be scrutinized and known. Taking it as the target of one’s attention, one should keenly know it in the heart. This knowledge of oneself will be revealed only to the consciousness which is silent, clear and free from the activity of the agitated and suffering mind; know that the consciousness which always shines in the Heart as the formless Self, ‘I’ and which is known by one’s being still without thinking about anything as existent or non-existent, that alone is the perfect reality.<sup>13</sup>

Truly speaking, pure consciousness is indivisible, it is without parts. It has no form and shape, no ‘within’ and ‘without’. There is no ‘right’ or ‘left’ for it. Pure consciousness, which is the Heart, includes all, and nothing is outside or apart from it. That is the ultimate truth.

From this absolute standpoint, the Heart, Self or consciousness can have no particular place assigned to it in the physical body. What is the reason? The body is itself a mere projection of the mind, and the mind is but a poor reflection of the radiant Heart. How can that, in which everything is contained, be itself confined as a tiny part within the physical body which is but an infinitesimal, phenomenal manifestation of the one reality? ▲

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<sup>12</sup> Sri Muruganar, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, vv.433 & 1232.

<sup>13</sup> Muni, Ganapati, *Sri Ramana Gita*, Ch.5, v.2.



# Death in Tiruvannamalai

NADHIA SUTARA

First, let me say that this is a very personal account. Although others of my vintage have had similar experiences and impressions, this account reflects only my own.

The first thing I noticed when arriving in Tiruvannamalai in the early 80s was a startling difference in people's attitude toward death. It was not something to be hidden away as though it didn't exist – or as if we all wished it didn't exist. It is as much a part of life as is birth, and I found Indians taking both parts in their stride in a much healthier way than ever I saw in the West.

In order to give an appropriate backdrop to the major incident I am going to describe, let me set the stage with the first death in India in which I had any part, shortly after my arrival in Tiruvannamalai. I was living on the Mountain in Guhai Namasivaya. Everything was very sparse and Spartan in those days: very few tourists, and then only during the winter months; only about 10 Westerners were living in Tiruvannamalai at the time, with 3 of us on the Mountain: Theresa Rigos, Narikutti Swami and me. One day Theresa came to Guhai Namasivaya and told me that the Mango Tree Cave swami,

Subramaniam, had died. She explained to me that any and everyone who had anything to do with the deceased was obliged to pay their respects at the funeral ceremony, so I prepared to go. Maniswami, the most literate of all the Mountain sadhus, was usually called in to do the rites, and he was already there arranging things when I showed up.

The first thing I noticed besides the order that Maniswami immediately brought to the situation was the Silence. I had never been near a just-deceased person before in my life, not to mention a sadhu, and the palpably thick spiritual Silence impressed me profoundly. I had the same experience some years later when Sadhu Om died. In fact, it has been my experience ever since that first one, that some mysterious blessing lingers around the recently deceased, especially if they have lived a spiritual life and not died in fear.

“What a difference to your garden variety Western funeral!” I thought. First, nobody was sad or crying, and it had nothing to do with the fact that Subramaniam Swami had managed to antagonize or alienate almost everybody who knew him except Theresa, a saintly lady and retired dentist, who had taken it upon herself to care for him in his last days. He was dying of TB and gasping for breath for many days before he expired.

She told us how she had offered to take him to the hospital where they could make him more comfortable by giving him oxygen, but he refused: he wanted to die on the Holy Mountain. She also told us that with every single gasp of breath, this man whom nobody had respected was repeating, “Arunachala! Arunachala,” once for the inbreath, once for the outbreath, day and night, until the end.

Later, when I read how Ramana Maharshi always found something good to say about a departed soul, I remembered how we all marvelled at Mango Tree Swami’s fortitude and determination in refusing all comfort and dying with his Ishta’s name on every single breath until the last. Truly, we never knew him until the day of his death, when we learned how profound his devotion had been!

After all the singing of Vedantic bhajans was over, the men took Swami’s freshly washed and clothed body to be buried. Theresa, Narikutti and I stayed behind at Theresa’s hut (Mango Tree Cave’s former kitchen room) and, over tea and biscuits, discussed what we wanted done with our bodies if we were lucky enough to die here.

Narikutti Swami, whose name means ‘little jackal’, said that if at all possible, he wanted his body to be left in a field as a banquet for his namesakes, the jackals. He also mentioned that he wanted to die sitting up. (Many years later he did manage to die sitting up, although the jackals were deprived of their feast.) Theresa said that she, a Catholic, wanted to die in meditation and be buried. And I firmly stated that I wanted to die with Arunachala’s name on my lips and be cremated without fuss or delay.

Our conversation was much more than matter-of-fact: it was singularly important to all of us, a sacred thing, not a shame or a tragedy or something to be hidden away. We were all going to die one day, and we were describing our ‘best possible death scenario’.

All of this brings me to the story of Satya Bilas Mukherjee’s death in January 1989. I was particularly friends with his son Somu Mukherjee, who was closer to my age than his parents and uncle Satya Prakash Mukherjee, who first brought the family from Calcutta to Sri Bhagavan in 1951. The entire family visited at least once a year. S.P. Mukherjee had built a house called ‘Upasana’ at Ramana Nagar in 1964 and died at Vellore CMCH in April 1974.

So, one day I happened to be walking down Osborne lane when I bumped into Somu Mukherjee, who was speaking animatedly with someone. As I approached, intending to go around them by way of courtesy, Somu called to me: “Nadhia! Please come over! My father died last night!” No, he was NOT crying. He was proud, triumphant and full of joy!

So I joined him and he told me the following story:

Around midnight of the night just passed, his father called out to him, “Somu, come quickly!” Somu got out of bed and ran to his father. Somu’s wife, Aruna, also got up and came. They found his father already sitting in *padmasana*.

“First,” Somu told me, “my father asked my wife to bring him a glass of water, so she went to the kitchen. Before she could return, he quickly told me that he was dying. He then raised his hands over his head in profound Anjali, and cried, ‘No more I am!’”

Somu’s mother was seated on his right and Somu rushed up to his left and quickly applied Bhagavan’s *vibhūti* to his forehead. On application of the vibhuti his father gave a big sigh of immense

satisfaction, and his head dropped onto Somu's right shoulder. There was no further intake of breath.

"I'm so proud of him, I have to tell everybody!" Somu concluded and went off without waiting for the traditional laments. He didn't want any laments. His father had gone to the same One he had been worshipping all his life: what was there to lament?

There have been many other blessed departures since then: quiet leave-takings, private or among friends and family, unremarkable in their simplicity and the serenity of the departed. But extraordinarily remarkable in stark contrast to the denial, fear, even terror that I had grown up with in the West. Although more than 30 years have passed since Somu's father passed gloriously into his Guru's Grace, it has remained with me as a living memory, a transformative reminder that this Path of spirituality, sincerely and wholeheartedly pursued, does indeed lead to the profoundly fearless and joyful end so exemplified by our Sri Bhagavan and His devotees. ▲

## Questions

Suresh Kailash

You who are praised as being  
beyond the ken reach of speech,  
with what prayers,  
beaded with what words,  
can you be reached?

And if it is through silence  
that you must be sought,  
then, who but you can nought  
the clamour of love's longing,  
its fevered thought?

Ah, Ramana, if you won't talk,  
won't I be forever lost  
in the vastness of your quiet,  
seeking answers to questions  
I know not who else to ask?

# The Maharshi and Mantra

## Part One

KAYS

The Sacred Syllable for Japa is the Utterance of the Guru.  
मन्त्रमूलं गुरोर्वाक्यं (*Guru Gitā*) v.74

The mere presence of Bhagavan – the embodiment of *jñāna* in all its regal grandeur and majesty – was in itself a ceaseless transmission of liberating Awareness. The bliss of Transcendence he was brimming with was continually radiating itself. His silence – “the language of Grace rising from within”<sup>1</sup> – was potent enough for one to embark on a spiritual odyssey within, with Him as the helmsman throughout the voyage. His speech was the song of the Absolute and each word that sprang up, reverberating from the deep eternal silence, was a mantra – nay, it was all at once – an initiation, instruction and revelation. Hence the need for verbal initiation by way of mantra never arose. Yet, either out of infinite compassion or divine urge, He did pronounce a few mantras. These grand exceptions constitute a beautiful bouquet of blossoms culled from the rich spiritual experience harvested within Him, from the fields of non-dual *jñāna*. They, trailing glories of the Self, the might of Truth and Grace, ever exude the fragrance of Brahman. How supremely fortunate must have been those direct recipients!

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<sup>1</sup> மெளனம் உள்ளெழும் ஒரு மொழி அருள்நிலையே (*maṇam uḷezhum oru mozhi aruḷ nilaiyē*) – Bhagavan, *Sri Ramana Nool Thirattu*, ‘Maṇam’, p. 271, “Assorted Verses and Utterances”.

Bhagavan never formally accepted anyone as his disciple. He, as a rule, advised devotees to go beyond rituals, *pūjā* and *japa* and trace all sounds back to their source.

In tune with the *Upaṇiṣad*-s, that trumpet loud and clear that “Liberation is by knowledge alone” (ज्ञानादेव कैवल्यम् – *jñānādeva kaivalyam*) and that “*ātma-jñāna* is the sole means to tranquillity” (आत्मज्ञानमेव विश्रान्तिः- *ātmajñānameva viśrāntiḥ*), Bhagavan emphasised that Self-enquiry is the sole means for Deliverance and the way to usher in Supreme Beatitude. He declared “For everyone this direct path is open”<sup>2</sup> and “this path is far easier than all other paths.”<sup>3</sup>

However, he did approve of other Pathways to God like devotion, because his view was that the Path suited to one’s temperament and spiritual psyche was the best for one. He further assured us that “the Guru will go with the disciple in his own path and then gradually turn him into the Supreme Path at the ripe moment.”<sup>4</sup>

For instance when someone asked, “Will *japa* of *gāyatrī* do for stilling of the mind?” Bhagavan answered, “Can anything excel it?”<sup>5</sup>

A devotee initiated into *Śakti Pañcākṣarī*, known as *Mantrēśvara* (Lord of mantras), by his father, had been told that it was the means to liberation. The son queried Bhagavan about it and on Bhagavan agreeing to it, he further asked “If this is so, then are you also practising the same mantra?” Bhagavan replied, “Yes! yes! the same mantra only.”<sup>6</sup> The stand of Bhagavan, who lived ever as the source of all sounds, is best explained in the words of Siva:

“I am the Form, essence and basis of all mantras.

Yet I remain, transcending them all, as the One Beyond.”<sup>7</sup>

Mantras are verbalisations by Seers of what is envisioned or experienced by them in visions stretching from heaven to earth by the sheer virtue of penance, pure and prolonged. But Bhagavan, ever steeped in the silence of the Self, beyond sight and sound, abided as the Sole Seer or the Infinite Eye in the void of Pure Awareness.

<sup>2</sup> *Upadēsa Undiyār*, V. 17, மார்க்கம் நேரார்க்குமிது (*mārkkam nēārkkumidu*).

<sup>3</sup> *Āṇḍma Vidyā Kīrttaṇam*, v. 4, எம்மார்க்கமெதனினும் இம்மார்க்கம் மிக்கெளிது. (*emmārkkamedañṇum immārkkam mikkeḷidu*).

<sup>4</sup> Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 22-11-45.

<sup>5</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§322.

<sup>6</sup> *Ramana Darsanam*. p.85.(English translation)

<sup>7</sup> *Ātma Sākṣātkāra Prakaraṇam*, v. 8.

When the Guru, after selecting the mantra most suited to the nature and need of the disciple imparts it to him, he instils, along with it, his own power of penance and experience; and the grace that accompanies the mantra makes it pulsate with life in the very being of the recipient and grants him fulfilment. If mantras were to emanate from a Guru and Seer of the stature of Bhagavan, who is the Fullness of the Self, who then can gauge the power and potency of these mantras?

**A mantra from “the mighty Guru even to the Lord of Mantras.”**  
(मन्त्रेश्वरस्य महतो गुरुतां वहन्तम् - *mantrēśvarasya mahato gurutām vahantam*)<sup>8</sup>

In Bhagavan’s case, the first ever verbal pronouncement emerging from the plenum of the Self – the Source – though a veritable ‘*mantra*’ for the entire gamut of ‘*mantra-sastra*’ and the path of *vicāra*, was, however, not in the form of a *mantra*. Charting the Infinite through both the paths of vichara and devotion, it provides perennial and invaluable advice to seekers and devotees and it blazes a new trail in the sphere of *sādhana* (spiritual practice).

New and original, unenunciated till then and not found in any book, Bhagavan’s revelation of this mighty spiritual Truth demands the exalted status of a ‘*mahāmantra*’ and ‘Mother of all mantras’. And the worthy recipient was none other than Ganapati Muni, who himself was reminiscent of a rishi of yore, due to his *tapas* [penance] and *upāsana* [worship].

Ganapati Muni, endowed with gifts divine from childhood roamed like a lion in every nook and corner of the Forest of the Vedas. After drinking deep from the spring of *mantra-sastra* sang like a lark in full-throated ease. Yet he was despondent and dispirited at not having experienced any tangible benefit despite his prolonged and rigorous *tapas*. In the divine scheme of things, this distress of the Muni was to prove to be a boon to spiritual seekers at large. This is because the Muni sought out the Brahmana Swami (as Bhagavan was known then). Clutching Bhagavan’s feet, he pleaded, in a choked voice, to be enlightened as to what *tapas* was. He confessed that this insight had eluded his grasp despite his mastery over Vedanta and his recital of

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<sup>8</sup> *Ramana Gita*, Chapter 18, verse 15.

countless crores of diverse *japas*. Preceded by Bhagavan's silent gaze for a full fifteen minutes, came the epoch-making pronouncement – a veritable mantra:

“If you watch from within where the notion ‘I’ springs, the mind is absorbed into That. That is *tapas*. When a mantra is repeated, if attention is directed to the source from where the mantra sound is produced, the mind is absorbed into That. That is *tapas*.”

Needless to say, waves of bliss rose up and soaked the Muni's frame. He felt that Bhagavan had bestowed on him a wealth of spiritual consciousness beyond the reach of mantra japa. Ganapati Muni thereupon declared Bhagavan to be the Sage of the Age and announced it to the world. He had found a Master, a great Seer, a mighty spiritual Soul and he therefore proclaimed, “Let the whole world know him as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.”<sup>9</sup> This was indeed a singular act of greatness bestowing a boon on humanity.

This service of the Muni to the world of devotees is two-fold: the eliciting of the mantra from the Source – the silence of Bhagavan – and in turn revealing a name and a mantra for Bhagavan, the chant of which will lead many to Light and Liberation. In addition, he drew forth from the Maharshi the *upadeśa* which besides affirming traditional wisdom provided a new path and a paradigm shift from the known methods of *tapas* and modes of meditation. The instruction to trace the sound to its source and the thoughts to the thinker – the ‘I’ of the meditator – revolutionized the spiritual path and serves as the lighthouse for all forms of *tapas* and modes of meditation.

The Guru appears to one when years or lives of penance make one pure, fit and sufficiently ripe and competent. Initiation from a Guru and Seer of the stature of Bhagavan is but the manifestation of the ever-present Grace leading to the expansion of consciousness and total liberation.

No wonder the scriptures hail in one voice: नास्ति गुर्वधिकम् तत्त्वम् (*nāsti gurvadhikam tatvam*) “There is no Truth greater than the Guru.”

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<sup>9</sup> Those who know the Vedas in parts are called ‘Rishi’, those who are masters of Vedas or who directly experience the Truth beyond and express the same in gracious words arising out of the experience are called Maharshis. Masters and Avatars exuding the divine presence of the Lord who teach Pure Truth leading to enlightenment are called Bhagavan.



## The Guru mantra

Love may be to the Atman, the one Reality – Nameless, Formless – or to the Infinite in a hallowed Name and Form or to a sacred syllable. Both constitute the ‘Religion of Love’. Forms are innumerable but the Name is all that exists. Bhagavan states that all Forms disappear in the Name and the Name in ‘*Nān*’ (‘I’). “Ask anyone, he says ‘I’ and speaks of himself as ‘I’. Even if He is *Īśvara*, His name too is ‘I’ only.”<sup>10</sup>

Saint Namdev declares, “The all-pervading nature of the Name can only be understood when one recognizes one’s own ‘I’.” One should surrender oneself “first at the feet of the Guru and learn to know that ‘I’ myself is that Name. After finding the source of that ‘I’, merge your individuality in that Oneness which is self-existent and devoid of all duality.”<sup>11</sup> When one knows oneself, then one finds the Name everywhere.

Hence, “Among the thousands of names of God, no name suits God, who abides in the Heart, devoid of thoughts, so aptly as ‘I’ or ‘I AM’.”<sup>12</sup>

In the holy book of the Bible the only sentence printed in capital letters, which is said to be uttered by God Himself, is, “I AM THAT I AM.” And ‘Jehovah’ (‘Yahweh’), the name of God among the Jews, means ‘I AM’. Lord Krishna said to Arjuna, “*Ahamatma Gudakesa*” – “I AM is the Self” – residing in all Hearts. The Gopis of Vraja, the exemplary and self-abnegating devotees of the Lord, sing of Him as the *Antarātman* (the ‘Self-I’).

Vallalar exclaims in ecstatic joy:

I became It,

It became me,

We became the embodiment of gnosis

And It became IT.

‘I’ became ‘That’. (நான் ‘தான்’ ஆனேனே!)

Bhagavan’s disciple, Swami Madhavatirtha, says, “‘I’ is also the *guru mantra*. It is said in the *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* that the first name of God is ‘I’. ‘*Aham nama abhavat*’. (‘He became the name ‘I’). OM came later. Atman always performs the japa of ‘I’.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Op.cit., *Talks*, Talk§582.

<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., *Talks*, Talk§448.

<sup>12</sup> *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v.714.

<sup>13</sup> Swami Madhavatirtha, p.233, *Power of the Presence*, Part I. ed. D. Godman.

This ‘I’ shines beyond the pale of thought and sound, transcending the realm of objective knowledge, and shines in thundering silence as ‘I’.

Bhagavan has also celebrated this mantra of the Lord in his immortal hymn as, Thou dancest in the Heart (of all beings) as ‘*Aham, Aham*’ (‘I-I’). ‘Heart’ is Thy name O Lord!<sup>14</sup>

How supremely fortunate were those direct recipients of this, Bhagavan’s Guru Mantra.

“Because the Lord abides as the Self (‘I’), meditation on the Atman is Supreme Love of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

Like fire in flint, oil in the sesame seed or the fragrance in flowers, so too, behind the ego-self stands the atman as ‘I-I’ in the Hearts of all. When the rising of the *jīva* as ‘I’ is keenly enquired within, feeling one’s way to the source, there shines a soundless vibration as ‘I-I’ – the flash of ‘*Aham*’ or Self – in the ethereal shrine of the Heart.

Bhagavan says, “In the interior of the Heart-cave Brahman alone shines in the form of Atman with direct immediacy as ‘I-I’.”<sup>16</sup>

In fact, among devotees, the remark was sometimes made, that as Bhagavan ever remained as the spiritual Heart, the constant shaking of his head was to the rhythm or throb of “*Aham, Aham*”. If only we can learn to trace and listen to this silent inner *japa* – or perhaps ‘*ajapa*’ – that goes on unceasingly within, and if we can be attuned to it, the goal of Self-realisation will very soon be within reach.

‘I AM’ is both our goal and our ever-existing Reality. The Lord who grants deliverance is the nameless formless content of ‘I-I’ – the effulgence of munificent Grace. As ‘I-I’ dances in the Hearts of all – both sinners and saints – as the ultimate embodiment of love, Vallalar calls this ‘the Dance of Altruistic Love’ or ‘The Dance of Charity’.

Bhagavan hails it with the delectable phrase, ‘*achala natanam*’ – “the dance of stillness of the radiant ocean of limitless Grace – the Self.”<sup>17</sup>

It is the vibration of the experience of *svarūpa* that is immovable by virtue of its Perfect Wholeness. It is pure experience without any

<sup>14</sup> *Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*, v.2.

<sup>15</sup> *Sri Ramana Nool Tirattu, Bhagavan’s Assorted Verses. Parābhakti*, p. 270.

ஆன்மாநு சந்தான மஃதுபர மீசபத்தி/ஆன்மாவாய் ஈசனுள னால்.

(*āṇmānu sandānam aḥduparam īsabhatti/āṇmāvāy īsan uḷaṇḷ*).

<sup>16</sup> *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, v.9.

<sup>17</sup> *Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*, v.7.

distinction between the experience and the experiencer. It is Pure Awareness, the form of Grace that keeps blessing all.

While the way to God (*bhakti*) is narrow and rough to trudge, the path of *vicāra* (*jñāna*) is like the razor's edge. In both, the monkey mind, turned tipsy, may stage a guerrilla war. Practise of either path demands purity of heart, perseverance and a certain amount of egolessness/humility. Periods of languor and despair, called the 'dark nights of the soul' may intervene and cause spells of lethargy.

But one is never outside the operation of Grace – because it is transcendent. The oscillating mind/ego is the obstacle to the play of Grace. But the Lord – the Self/'I-I' exudes eternal Grace. However, the price He demands is our 'head' or ego. Be it *vicāra* (*jñāna*) or devotion (*bhakti*), one has to give up one's ego ('head') and die while alive, in order to find the perfect Love. In the words of Kabir:

God's House

Is the house of Love, not of an aunt.

Cut off your head, else you cannot enter.<sup>18</sup>

Holy Grace manifests Itself as the start of enquiry (*jñāna vicāra*) or the dawn of love (*bhakti*) for the Lord. Mounting war against our *vāsanā*-s (mental formations; habitual tendencies) It buoys up and strengthens our efforts like a strong wind joining the blazing fire of love or enquiry. The 'I' and 'mine' of the seeker/devotee are burnt away in the flames of love (for the Self/Awareness or God), the devotee's efforts cease and holy passivity/stillness and *parābhakti* ensue, heralding the dawn of Self-realisation.

Thus, the small self is rejoined to the Self-nature (Pure Being-Consciousness or *sat-chit*) and one abides as 'That'. Therefore, the Lord who grants deliverance is the nameless, formless, thought-free content of 'I-I'. And that is the Supreme mantra – the Guru mantra.

While humanity at large was instructed in this *japa*, through his writings and his words of grace, a fortunate few directly received this teaching from Bhagavan Himself. ▲

(To be continued)

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<sup>18</sup> *Granthavali*, v. 272.



View of a South Face of Mount Kailash from Lake Manasarovar

# Australian Kailash Yatra 2018

## Part Three

CHEENU SRINIVASAN

*Om Nama Shivaya  
Om Namo Bhagavate Shri Ramanaya*

### **The Four Day Parikrama around Mount Kailash**

Our four-day parikrama in 2018 of the Outer Kora (some 52 km) commenced from Darchen on Wednesday 12th September and finished on Saturday 15th September. Successfully completing this Kora over four days was the very purpose of our Kailash Yatra.

On the night of Tuesday 11th September, we had to repack in such a way that we could only use half the volume in a duffel bag with the other half to be shared with your spouse (or rooming partner of those men and women travelling as ‘singles’ in our group). This was cargo for the sturdy yaks on the Parikrama while the used clothes were left behind at Darchen in our other duffel bag.

### **Day 1: Darchen to Dirapuk (20km)**

Driving a short distance from our Darchen guest house, we arrived at the Kora’s starting point called Yamadwar (Tibetans call this gateway

Cheenu Srinivasan lives in Sydney, Australia, was drawn into Bhagavan’s orbit some fifteen years ago and visits Sri Ramansramam regularly. He feels blessed that he and his wife Soumya could bring waters from Lake Manasarovar and Gowri Kund for *abhišekam* at Bhagavan’s shrine last February.

‘Tarboche’), the gateway of the God of Death through which one enters the abode of Lord Shiva.

We spent over an hour waiting for our ponies (mules) to arrive with their handlers. Soon thereafter yaks were sighted and a few men to herd them with their cargo of our luggage-duffel bags, groceries, gas cylinders, stoves, pots and pans.

It is worthwhile recalling here that from the very early planning stages of our Kailash Yatra, our leader had instructed us all to only carry our bare essentials in our backpack, trekking poles and at least a litre of water. He had also insisted that each of us should hire an animal (US\$565/- cash!) as there is no way to fetch one at short notice should we sprain an ankle or feel too tired to walk some 15-20 km each day while on the Kora.

After what seemed a protracted discussion, the pony handlers agreed to carry our backpacks and, from a lottery system, we got an animal and its keeper assigned to each of us. The Tibetan name of the horseman was provided in the slip with instructions that we were to keep it safe and get acquainted with the size, colour and gear of the animal and its handler! This turned out to be a tough call in my case, with a difficult to pronounce Tibetan name, while my wife got it easy with a three letter horseman, the lovely young man Uri.

The last time I had been on horseback was in Alberta, Canada at a classmate’s farm. They were huge farm horses while these ponies in Tibet were much smaller. I decided that I would conserve energy and not walk on Day 1 of the Kora. Having paid some significant cash, why not enjoy a slow ride is what I thought.

Getting atop the animal and sliding our trekking shoes between the stirrups was a tough ask. The art of swinging your leg over the saddle was one to master and stiff hamstrings do not help. There are no reins and one holds on to a semicircular handle that sits in front of the saddle. To my discomfort and that of many of the others, we found that the handle was too small for our gloved hands to go under and that barely two fingers could be used from each hand to hold on for dear life on these animals!

The ride though was pleasant despite people advising me to expect a sore back and bum. Perhaps my fitness was up to scratch that I experienced no such discomfort and even began to enjoy the slow pace. My only regret was that I could not take photos while riding

but found a way out. Young Tsering Sherpa agreed to take pictures and was given a quick lesson on composing and shooting in the automatic mode.

This leg of the Kora with substantially long stretches of gentle climbs and descents was very pleasant. The weather that day was kind to us and those who preferred to walk kept a good pace while those of us on our ponies did well to avoid falls and keep our balance, both mental and physical.

After a pre-packed lunch and the animals having earned their feed and rest, we hobbled back on to our respective animals and went ahead. I realised that mounting the pony was a lot easier than getting off it! Thanks to large boulders along the way, these served well as stepping blocks where needed.

We reached Dirapuk around 5 PM and there was plenty of light before the sun disappeared behind the clouds. In front of our rest house (more like freight containers, making up our dorm accommodation), rose majestically Mount Kailash. We were just a few kilometres, perhaps 6-7 km or so, from the North Face of the mountain.

A hard day's trek does demand at a minimum sound rest overnight so that we are all well prepared for the steep climb to the North Face. For reasons inexplicable, a number of us were denied our booked accommodation as the Tibetan agent at Dirapuk had double booked and hence our sleeping quarters remained the property of the previous night's occupants!

While heated arguments and reasoning were not helpful, we resigned ourselves to our fate. We needed to have our dinner and somehow manage that night, knowing that we would be better accommodated for the second night's stay at Dirapuk. Despite our discomfort and cramped sleeping arrangements, we snatched some rest, accepting it as part of the divine play.

## **Day 2: Towards the North Face from Dirapuk (12-15km return)**

The morning of Thursday 13th September felt special as this was the day when many of us were going to get a lot closer to HIM. With the medical team advising us who could go on the steep climb and who could not, everyone of us knew his/her capacity to take it on and hence there was no real argument. A small group of men and five women

walked varying distances towards a look-out point, while the rest in our group of 19 went ahead with our Sherpas.

The climb towards the North Face presented many challenges: a gushing stream, large boulders, the odd yak and here and there ice a few inches thick. With a steady, slow and measured step, with a full view of the holy mountain in front of us, we were all drawn towards HIM by an unknown and unknowable power. One felt HIS presence and guiding hand, step by step.

Some three hours into our climb, we stopped to be absorbed in the sheer beauty of the majestic mountain before us, to say our prayers to Śiva, prostrate and have a lunch break. Even to get to this vantage point to the North Face, we had to dodge warning flags along the way and had taken a chance, as the Sherpa leader was confident that we could push ahead.

Three men in our group with great mental resolve and physical capacity, all aged below the mid-forties, had decided to venture further with the Sherpas, one of whom was carrying an ice axe. The call of Lord Śiva must have been unstoppable for these men, as they gingerly walked another 3.5 km or so across frozen crevices beating the arrival of a potential snow storm to reach the North Face. These men along with their Sherpas were the chosen few who were able to touch the mountain and return to base safely, some two hours after we had returned to base.

That evening we celebrated Ganesh Chaturthi much like how the puja would have been done at home. Our leader had planned every small detail and one can only say that it was a blessing indeed to witness first hand his 'shraddha' right through the two hour session that included the offering of traditional 'modakas' for Ganesha and the Telugu custom of telling stories about Ganesha.

Timed to perfection, one of our young Yatrikas who had braved it all to reach the North Face had just returned to base and joined us at the puja. He gave us a first person account of his experience in Telugu (with a brief summary in English thereafter) on how he had felt some kind of magnetic aura around the holy mountain and how he had totally surrendered to HIM in his quest to get to HIS proximity.

By any account what we all heard was the most stirring and spiritually laden moment of our entire yatra. Moist eyes and visible tears of spiritual emotion were beyond anyone's control. It was indeed



Cheenu Srinivasan



North Face of Mount Kailash

the best first person narration I had ever heard, even if the finer points of an alien language Telugu, had escaped me.

The *puja* completed and the *prasad* taken, it was time for our Ganesha to be sent off on his journey (*visarjan*) down the stream flowing down from the North Face. Dinner followed, our Diamox taken and a peaceful night's rest summoned.

As for me, I too had HIS blessing, retiring on a bed where I could close my eyes seeing HIM to my left and waking up in the morning looking up again at HIS majestic presence. I could not have asked for more.

### **Day 3: Dirapuk to Zutrulpuk (18 km)**

Friday 14th September, our third day on the Kora was by all accounts going to be a challenge taking on the Dolma La Pass at 5630 m. I had decided to ride the pony that morning and not to take any chances. Many of our more able men had decided to continue with their walk of the Kora.

Over many steep climbs and long stretches of sheer beauty and winds that suddenly roared and as quietly disappeared in silence, each of us had to keep our focus, the walkers focusing on the next step forward, while the riders were either leaning forward while climbing, or leaning back while descending. Even the poor animals needed to pause every now and then.

On approaching the Dolma La Pass, we dismounted and walked upwards taking in the little lake of Gowri Kund to our right. The many prayer flags there fluttered to wind swept music of their own while Yatrikas from other groups slowly made their way through the Pass, just like us, after passing through the glaciers.

The descent from Dolma La Pass is not for the faint hearted and weak of limbs. It is very, very steep with loose soil and gravel that easily gives way, calling for extreme caution and attention to every step down the incline. Eventually one gets to substantially easier terrain and the sight of a campsite at a distance warms our hearts with the prospect of a well-earned break for lunch, water and protein nibbles.

During the last stage of the climb, I had lost my horseman and with him my backpack, wallet tucked away at the bottom, water bottle and camera. I was a bit concerned that he may have bolted and

anxiety got the better of me till being reassured by Tsering Sherpa that the backpack would be safe and I need not worry. On reaching the campsite, I sought out my lad and he seemed totally at ease as if nothing had happened!

Our lunch was a samosa, a piece of cheese, an apple and a fruit drink, all consumed gratefully while a chocolate bar was happily eaten by my horseman alongside a few pieces of chewing gum and protein bars and nuts. The walkers were trickling in and soon our assembly of orange down jackets signalled our group's safe crossing of Dolma La Pass.

After our lunch break, some of us were back on our ponies while a few took to walking along with those who had walked all day. Our evening destination of Zutrulpuk was some three hours away. We were now on substantially lower gradient climbs and descents. Though tired, one could not afford to go to sleep while in the saddle.

It was only at the lunch break that my wife Soumya, told me that she had fallen a couple of times prior to Dolma La Pass. She said that she was fine despite a severe headache. The fear of falling off the animal banished sleep from my mind. Safety first, safety always, were the rules to be adhered to at all times on a Kailash Yatra.

Speaking of safety, our leader now on his fourth Kora had the benefit of prior experience and he had, therefore insisted that we all wear helmets while riding the ponies. My wife, unbeknown to me, had removed her helmet as it was aggravating her persistent headache. I was none too pleased with her defense as you would expect protective spouses to be!

We arrived at Zutrulpuk a little after 4.30 pm and our logistics folks had their task cut out, thankfully this time with adequate beds averaging four per room. Of these two places which provided just the bare minimum overnight accommodation – Dirapuk and Zutrulpuk, Zutrulpuk was much worse. Even the Tibetan public facilities were obnoxiously filthy and therefore we asked for our private toilet tents to be made ready at the earliest.

The yaks in their wisdom had decided to give our bags very rough treatment. Several of our duffel bags arrived with completely ripped sides and smeared with dung, dust and grime. Thankfully, most of us had stuck to the discipline of packing our belongings in plastic storage bags which had endured rather well their ride on yaks.

Dinner that evening saw the welcome return of our soup laced with garlic that we had missed earlier. With a few of us still suffering relentless headaches, the medical team advised us that where possible, spouses should stay together. This, no doubt, was a well thought through recipe for recovery and it worked well.

My wife outlined her rationale now for not wearing a helmet saying her two falls took her sideways and that her head was not anywhere near the ground! Our rooming partner, calm and collected at all times, offered just a few words: 'I happen to know a little about head injuries as a neuro-surgeon'. You can bet your bottom dollar that my wife's helmet was now going to be on her head for the last leg of the Kora!

#### **Day 4: Zutulpuk to Darchen (14km)**

The final day's trek from Zutulpuk to Darchen was relatively easy with the hills to our right and the river to our left, with steep gorges at many places over the 14 km stretch. The Kora path reduces significantly in width with sign posts urging people to dismount and walk.

I had decided to walk the entire distance, given that I now had had enough of riding. Besides, I wanted to take a few pictures now that we were on the home stretch back to our starting town of Darchen.

On arriving at our finishing point, we parted with the animals and handlers who had to return for their next Kora. With the four-day trek now complete, our phone/cameras were on overdrive with pictures being snapped of the now successful 19 Yatrikas and our accompanying team of Sherpas.

A few in our group were not done yet and decided to walk back to the town of Darchen, which was a few kilometres away, while the rest of us were content with our mission accomplished and to get sooner to the relative luxury of a more acceptable place of overnight rest.

At Darchen we discovered that we needed to find alternative accommodation as the plumbing was a problem at the place we had stayed earlier. Luckily, an alternative venue was found shortly after we had eaten our packed lunch.

The evening saw us celebrate our leader's birthday. It was only fitting that it also doubled up as an evening to celebrate given the successful completion of our four-day Kailash Outer Kora.

## **Returning to Pasupathinath Temple, Kathmandu**

On the morning of Sunday 16th September, we took our last look at Mount Kailash from Darchen before our long drive to Saga. Tempting as it was to break journey at Lake Manasarovar, we decided that staying on the road to reach Saga by sunset was prudent.

Given the good road in this stretch, there was little drama. We craned our necks for yet another distant peek of Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. Our lunch stop was timed with a bio-break coupled with the regulatory 20 minute stop. Saga was reached by sunset after driving past the now familiar sand dunes and the Brahmaputra river and its tributary.

Our Tibetan guide worked his charm with his network of local Saga contacts and advised us to be ready for an early morning departure at 6 am to avoid the massive delays caused when Chinese workers started work at 8 am on the construction of a new highway running parallel to the dirt track we had taken a few days earlier from Gyirong to Saga if it meant we could reach. Foregoing a little sleep if it meant reaching Gyirong earlier, made sense to all of us.

With some well-honed and safe driving skills, our Chinese driver reached the T-Junction heading to Gyirong in record time. The previous high-altitude hillside of 5236 m hardly excited any of us. ‘Yes, we have been to greater heights this time’ seemed to resonate in all of us!

It was at one of our mandatory 20 minute halts near Gyirong that I spoke to our leader suggesting that at lunch, we serve our Sherpas first before we have our lunch. Somewhat surprised but agreeing to my request, he asked me to run this past the Nepali Sherpa leader, Wangchhu Sherpa. After I had explained why I felt this was important for us 19 yatrikas to do, as a small act of saying thanks, Wangchhu Sherpa agreed. And with that perhaps for the first time in their lives, the Sherpas were served their food ahead of their Kailash Yatra paymasters!

Post lunch, our formal thanks were said by our leader, and gift monies were given to each of the Sherpas, guides and the Chinese driver. All that was now left to be done was to rest, recover and finally say goodbye to Diamox!

Early on the morning of Tuesday 18th September, we set off for the 45 minute downhill drive to the Tibet-Nepali border of Rasuwagadi. Immigration processing went without a hitch, with us lining up as

1-19 as at every one of the Chinese check posts. It was time now to bid goodbye to our very dear Tibetan guide, Phung Tso and his mate Gamma. They were remarkable for their service and had worked seamlessly with Wangchhu Sherpa and his men.

Crossing the so-called friendship bridge, we now re-entered the familiar world of utter chaos in Nepal and safely made it to Kathmandu, but not without some drama, overcoming landslides and a long wait for our chopper flights.

Our Kailash Yatra leader, Doctor Garu as we called him, had composed beautiful verses in Telugu invoking the grace of Lord Pasupathinath for our pilgrimage. We returned to have HIS darshan in thanksgiving on the morning of Wednesday 19th September grateful that 19 of us had successfully completed our Kailash Yatra.

### **Impressions after a Kailash Yatra**

Everyone of us had set out with some expectations based on reading books and blogs, watching videos and hearing from people who had been to Mount Kailash. While the core purpose of the pilgrimage was a dip in the holy Lake Manasarovar and the parikrama of Mount Kailash, our expectations set the backdrop against which impressions were formed of our experience.

I had read and heard that it was tough and that no amount of mental and physical preparation can be deemed adequate to face the realities that one encounters on this yatra. I was prepared as best I could and completing the yatra largely trouble free was a blessing and immensely fulfilling. My wife and I realised then, and on our return home, that mere words are inadequate. There is that inherent undercurrent of calm that we are both aware of at some deep level within us to tap into.

One of my friends had asked us if it was true from our experience of the Kailash Yatra that faith moves mountains? This is best answered from my wife's experience. She was suffering from relentless headache and low oxygen levels in her blood count. While not serious enough to warrant oxygen, it was a testing time for her and our expert medical team. Determined to recover and to realise her dream of a Kailash parikrama, she wandered off to sit alone by the shores of Lake Manasarovar and focussing on the distant Mount Kailash, she had prayed intensely. That evening she recovered well and was fit again for the most arduous leg of the yatra over the next four days.



People have asked us what surprised us most. In all honesty, I was surprised myself as was my wife that we were able to handle the situation from day to day adjusting to the facts and conditions before us even when at times one had reason to feel depressed because things went completely off plan. All of us in our group had to endure disappointments, accept them and move on.

Then there is the question of whether the yatra has changed our outlook on life. I would say it has to a remarkable degree that we see things with quiet reflection and empathise a lot more having seen with others, the conditions in Tibet and Nepal: the poverty and lack of health and hygiene that we don't face as existential issues in our own daily lives.

Does one feel different now after the yatra? The answer is an emphatic 'yes' though it is for others to make a judgement on this. My friends have told me that I have become a lot quieter and that at times my body language gives away my inability to stand social trivia!

As for the overall insights gained, both my wife and I recognised that even a spiritual yatra cannot over the short span of 10 days put a long term lid on our mind's vessel of 'vasanas'. To put the lid back on old ways of thinking and reacting, we are well aware that we have the free will to act and that act we can. That to me personally is an enduring insight that will stand the test of time and have me return to my own core, that the Kailash Yatra has made me aware of.

Would I want to go on another Kailash Yatra? For my wife and I going on the yatra was indeed a dream come true. On the other side of 65 years, we both need to rest content within and be of help where we can for others to realise their dreams of a Kailash Yatra. Even a spiritual desire is a desire after all. But then one can never say never if HE beckons, even if it is time now for me to travel within.

At the time of writing this article, close to a year after our Kailash Yatra of 2018, I am aware that both the Indian and Chinese governments are working to improve the comfort of Kailash Yatrikas with more Rest Houses and public amenities. While this is welcome news, let me conclude with the few takeaways that I can offer:

- Prepare as best you can;
- Accept surprises and sudden change of plans;
- Leave only footprints and respect nature's vagaries; and
- Be in the moment at all times. ▲



# The Art of Dying

SURESH NATARAJAN

“If you die before you die, then when you die, you don’t die.”  
— Inscribed on a wall at St. Paul’s Monastery, Mount Athos.

Memories, however beautiful they may seem, are dead things. And all we take ourselves to be, the I, is just memory. One may argue that my body is not a memory. It is certainly true that the body functions with no memory and lives perfectly in the moment. The heart never seems to compare how I pumped blood yesterday with how I am doing today. The liver doesn’t crave for any particular food but just works on digesting whatever is passed on. And so with each organ. They just handle what they are meant to do in any given moment in the best possible way with a tremendous intelligence that is untouched by thought. And when the machinery gets worn out or abused long enough, they gracefully stop working too without any conception of death. But we have no idea of how the body functions in the actual sense except through what the physiologists tell us, which is just memory. And then there is the all cultural input of what constitutes beauty which is again acquired memory. So, our conception of ‘my body’ is entirely a construct of memory. Therefore, it results in comparisons, goals, praying for longevity, etc., all of which the body doesn’t seem to care about one bit.

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Our idea of ‘my mind’ is of course entirely a construct of memory. All it is, is a fictitious entity made up of opinions, ideas, images, knowledge, experiences all gathered up from the past and stored over time. And any identities associated with one’s race, religion, caste, colour, creed, country, etc. all belong to the mind — they are just acquired memories. That’s why it always happens that one with enough persuasive skills is able to tap into ones identity by playing up an imagined version of a glorious past and blowing it out of proportion, while making other identities look inferior and cause men to kill men for the sake of ideas.

So, when we refer to the first-person pronoun ‘I’, it only implies an identification with the body and the mind in their various avatars. Therefore, there is the I that is nationalistic or linguistic, the I that is a family man or a bachelor, the I that is a student or a professional, the I that is healthy or sick, etc. Underlying all of these various avatars is the basic superimposition of an idea or memory from the past as one’s own identity.

Because this superimposed identity for the ‘me’ and the other plays an outsized role in all relationships, our energy goes only into sustaining and strengthening these identities, as we relate with others in various ways. We are unable to pay attention to the act of relating itself.

This being the case, we look for a way out of this mess. But the paradox is that the very looking for a way out of the mess is based on an idea that there is an individual entity in there who can be free of this mess and supposedly live in an ‘enlightened’ or ‘realized’ manner. It is only another trick conceived and dangled by thought in front of us to perpetuate itself.

This very idea is again an image from the past and therefore continues the same neurosis in a different form by creating an image of a seeker who is then practising various techniques and methods, gathering more and more knowledge, all in an effort to attain another image from the past and ‘become’ an enlightened being. But any process of becoming through time is always temporary and when the underlying cause of the becoming wears out, the effect ceases to be. This is the reason Adi Sankara emphatically states that any amount of *karma* (action), however pious can never result in freedom. Jnana (direct realisation) alone is the way.

So, what is this direct realisation? Death. Not the physical killing of the body, which only continues the same mess in a different form. Instead it is dying to the past. It is dying to all the memories that are built up as images in our minds and cloud over the simple presence of being that makes all actions possible.

It is dying to all outgoing interests such as politics, economics, social activism, art, entertainment etc.

It is dying not only to the so-called worldly images, but also to all the so-called religious or spiritual images.

It is dying to all methods and techniques.

It is dying to all insights and understanding.

It is dying to any imagined state of freedom.

It is dying to all intentions and desires including the desire for liberation.

It is dying to making a merely mechanical practice out of any teaching such as self-inquiry, complete attention, surrender etc.

It is simply to be extremely alert and instantly deny the past, no matter in what form it rises.

Then the body continues with its own tremendous intelligence, now unburdened by thought-created psychosomatic troubles. The transactional memory necessary to recognize people, places and things continues to work perfectly. Thought falls into its place functioning sanely and intelligently for what it is meant to do — handling other products of thought such as cars, computers, cooking and other functional aspects of living.

Therefore, what we need to learn is the art of dying in each moment. There is no need then for any ‘art of living’ which would be only another borrowed idea from the past. When the art of dying is learned, living takes care of itself in the most harmonious manner.

And all conceptualization of meditation or surrender stops and true meditation or surrender begins, which is to just be.

“Do not meditate — be.

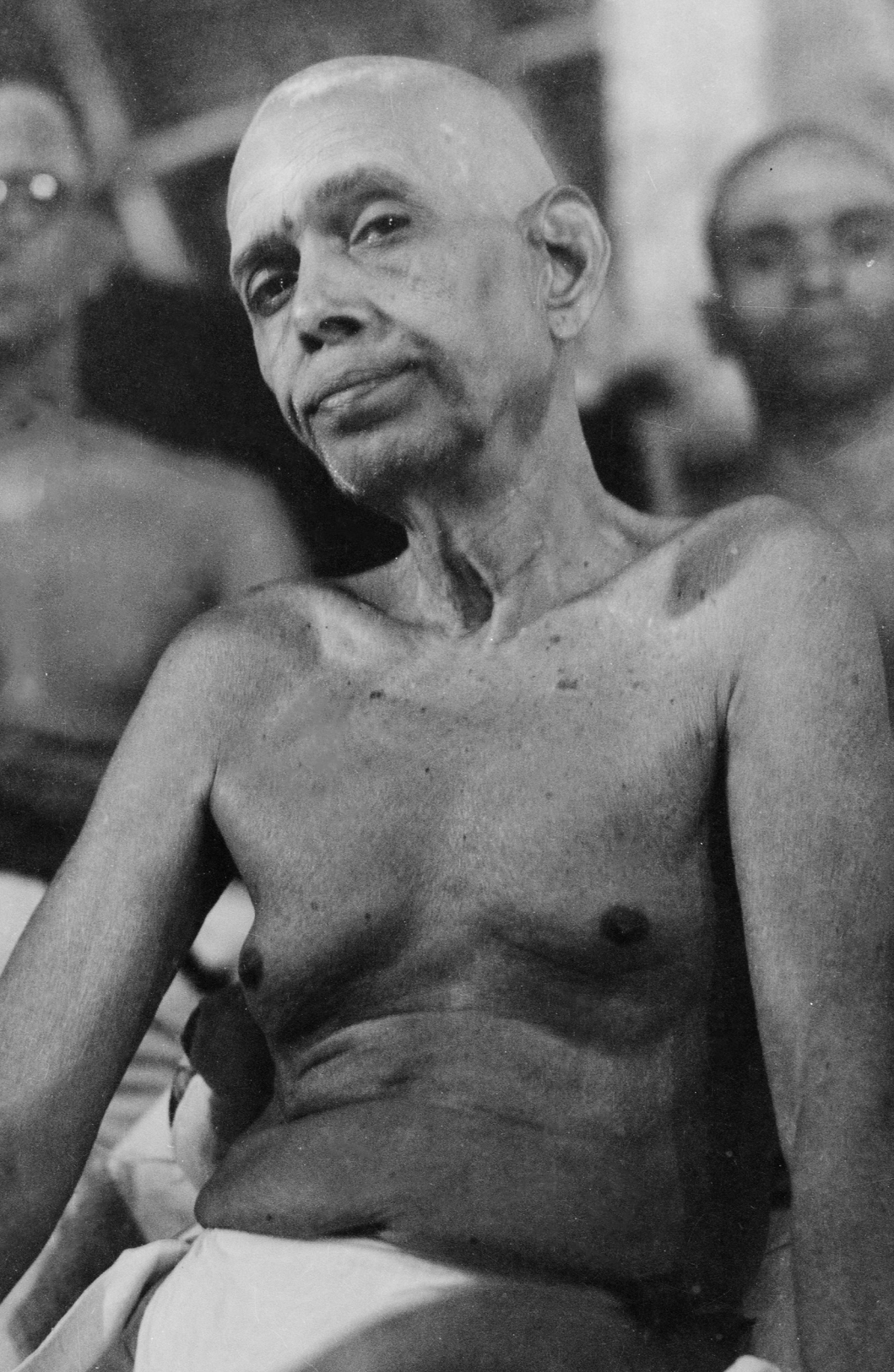
Do not think that you are — be.

Do not think about being — you are.”<sup>1</sup> — Sri Ramana Maharshi




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<sup>1</sup> Swaminathan, K., *The Mountain Path*, Vol.18, No.1, 1981.



# HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

## The Valley of Great Peace

### Part Two

SHARON MAAS

#### **December 1973 – May 1974**

I had come home. Walked under the arch. Ahead of me was the majestic Arunachala Hill. I walked across the sandy entrance courtyard, into the Ashram premises. My heart thumped so loudly I could feel it, almost hear it. A little thin Indian man with greying hair, dressed all in white, approached me, a smile upon his face, hands together in a namaste.

“Welcome, welcome!” he said. “I am Raja, the ex-postmaster. Where are you coming from?”

A tricky question. I’d come overland; a flight from Guyana, South America, to London, and from there trains, buses, budget hotels through Europe, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, North India down to Tamil Nadu.

“Oh, you have come a long way. I will take you to the Ashram office.”

I followed him up the slight flight of steps to a low building on the left, past what seemed to be a small temple. “Just go in and register yourself,” said Raja, and left me to my fate.

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Inside the dark building sat a man on the floor in front of a low desk. He had white hair, fair skin for an Indian, and a stern expression on his face. Quite the opposite of Raja's welcoming smile.

I showed him V. Ganesan's letter of invitation.

"How long?" He snapped the question.

I wanted to say "forever", of course, but instead I stuttered something about "as long as possible".

"Three days!" he snapped again and shoved a key across the desk at me, with a room number on it. "Morvi Guest House, across the road."

That was it. Three days! I was stunned, both by his unfriendly reception and by the "three days". I wanted to cry out, "but this is my forever home!" But I was simply too stunned to object. I walked away.

Outside the office, Raja was waiting for me. "I will show you to your room," he said, and led me back out to the street and across the road to a large compound containing a central building and what looked like rooms in a square around three outside walls. My room was a tiny cubicle, a little cot filling half the space. I was used to simple lodgings and it seemed wonderful to me; I was more worried about the "three days". They sounded like a sentence, a verdict on my unsuitability to this place. Raja left me to settle in; I collapsed on to the cot and had a bit of a weep. The journey here had been so exhausting, so filled with anticipation; and now I was to be thrown out! In a country that was not my own, where I was a stranger, so far from family and friends...

But – I was home, and soon my joy at being here at all outweighed my fears. I pulled myself together, had a quick shower in the little bathroom near my room, changed my clothes, and went out into the sunshine.

Closing the door on another room across the courtyard was a pretty young blonde woman, who immediately smiled at me and introduced herself as Marlies, from Germany. She spoke perfect English.

"How long are you staying?" It was a question I was to hear over and over again, but on that first day it had the power to bring tears to my eyes.

"The man in the office said three days!" I replied.

"Ah, Mr Koppikar. Don't worry about that grumpy old man. I will talk to him. He will extend it to a week or two."

I wanted to say that even a week or two was too short, but I was too overcome with gratitude to protest: she would help, and that was the main thing. We walked over to the Ashram together, crossing a quiet road, dodging a bicycle or two, a bullock cart, a horse-drawn tonga, a bicycle rickshaw.

“This road is too busy,” said Marlies. “Those bicycle rickshaws don’t look where they are going; they just rely on their bells. Be careful.”

She grabbed my hand and led me across. We walked under the Ashram arch, and there was Raja again. It seemed he was the Ashram’s self-appointed Meeter and Greeter. He took over from Marlies.

“Would you like me to show you around?” he asked, and I nodded. I’d like nothing better. And so he led me from one place to the next. The Mother’s Temple, the Samadhi Shrine and Big Hall, the Mahanirvana Room, and, finally, the Meditation Hall.

“This is where Bhagavan used to give darshan,” he whispered, and dropped down to a full-body prostration. It was the first time I had seen such a thing, and I was slightly perplexed: should I do the same? What was the etiquette here? For the time being I left it; I placed my hands together in a namaste, and felt the swelling of love in my heart as I gazed into Bhagavan’s eyes. This was it; this really was it. This was Him, and He had brought me right here to his feet. It was as if He was sitting there himself, alive as ever, not just a portrait. I was overwhelmed; instinctively I sank to my knees, bowing down, touching my head to the floor.

We continued our tour. Raja pointed out the dining hall, showed me the men’s living quarters at the back of the Ashram, the gate that led up to Skandashram; the Veda school, the cowshed, the library, next door to the cowshed, right at the back of the Ashram: a tiny dark room lined with bookshelves.

A young man sat at a small desk. “This is Philip,” said Raja, and introduced me. Philip greeted me with a huge smile and a British accent. I looked at Raja and said, “Thank you – I’ll stay here for a while and look at the books.”

Books were my lifeline, my anchor, my lifesavers. It was a book that had brought me to this place, brought me home. I knew the power of books, and, after the meditation hall, I knew that the library would

be my favourite place in the Ashram. I stayed, looked at the books, chatted with Philip, told him my story, heard his.

Like Marlies, he was here long term, had been coming for years, was an old hand, unlike me, a rank newcomer. But he did not make me feel like a newcomer, a stranger; he spoke to me as a friend, one who shared a precious secret. The sense of having come home strengthened. If not for that ‘three days’ sentence hanging over me...

Soon it was dinner time, announced by a loud metal gong. A few people had gathered at the door to the dining hall, Indians as well as Westerners. It seemed that I counted as a Westerner, in spite of my dark skin; it was my hair, wild and woolly, and my clothes, trousers and T-shirt, which identified me as a foreigner.

We filed in: a large red-tiled room, the walls covered in framed photographs of Bhagavan, other saints and sages, devotees, a section at the back divided off by a portable screen. Against the left wall, a large portrait of Bhagavan, which everyone greeted as they walked past. We sat in rows on the floor, behind leaf-plates. Foreigners occupied two rows and sat all together, because there was a special non-spicy food for foreigners. Servers walked up and down the row, ladling vegetables and rice on to our leaf-plates, filling our metal tumblers with buttermilk and warm milk, handing out a banana each at the end.

Discreetly I eyed the other foreigners. There was Marlies, chatting animatedly with a dark-haired young woman. There was a particular couple: I had seen them enter together, and at once recognised them as somehow “remarkable”: the way they laughed together, the confidence and joy they emitted, the sense that they were old-timers here, that they belonged in a way I did not. I would see them many times over the next day or two: at mealtimes, tea time in the afternoon, walking together, always together, always so joyful. I felt a yearning to know them: I found out their names were Hugo and Jacqueline. Hugo was German, Philip told me, a homeopathic doctor who lived here full time, and Jacqueline was French who came from Paris every year for the winter. He spoke of them, especially of Hugo, with a trace of awe in his voice.

A day or two later, soon after breakfast, I saw the two of them walk across the back courtyard along with a couple of other foreigners: Philip, Marlies, one or two others I had not met yet. There was a



purpose to their stride: I watched. They walked out the back and through the little metal gate that led to Skandashram. I waited a minute or two, and followed. It was my first walk up to Skandashram.

I had read about this path. In the early days Bhagavan lived up in the little mountain hermitage a little way up the Hill from Tiruvannamalai town. His mother, desperate to find him after he had left home as a sixteen-year-old, eventually located him and joined him there as one of his early devotees. He eventually lived there for seven years, or until she passed away – absorbed into the divine consciousness which is the true Self of us all. She was buried as a self-realised saint at the bottom of the hill, exactly on the spot where the Mother's Temple now stands, and every day Bhagavan would walk down through the stones and thorns to visit her grave. One of the then devotees, noting the rough path down the hill, single-handedly built a solid path of stones; the very path I was now walking up, stepping from one stone to the next. A walk of about half an hour.

It is a mesmerising walk to this day. After a few minutes one is alone on the Hill, alone in a shallow valley that seems as deeply silent as a desert night. There were no trees, no plants, nothing but the soft mounds on all sides, and behind it all the Hill rising up to its perfect peak. Lemon grass, thin lime green blades almost waist high, waved in the breeze as if gently stroked by a giant hand. Here and there, huge grey stones reared up in shapes and sizes that seemed almost prehistoric. A sense of deep peace rested along this walk; I felt it as surely as I felt my own breath, the beating of my heart.

I walked slowly, and from the start the group I was following seemed to have shaken me off – I was alone in the vast solitude of the Hill, and every step seemed to be something special, something holy, something deep and still and breath-taking.

The path made a few gentle turns; soon I was above the town, shrouded by a gentle mist out of which the towers of the great temple rose. And finally, I walked up the stone staircase that would take me to Skandashram. Nobody was there. The door was open, but the two tiny rooms of the Ashram were empty. There was nobody in the front courtyard, nobody anywhere around.

I sat for a while on the concrete wall overlooking the town, closed my eyes to once more absorb the peace of the place, then returned

the way I had come, somehow disappointed. I'd been hoping to find Hugo's group. Perhaps they'd gone up to the mountaintop.

The following day the same thing happened. The group walked up the path, I followed shortly after them, but once at Skandashram they disappeared. On the third day I did it differently. I left for Skandashram immediately after breakfast, and, halfway up the Hill, chose a convenient flat rock on which to sit and meditate. To be sure, after a few minutes I saw them coming; Hugo, followed by Philip and the others. I saw them, they must have seen me sitting there. Philip was talking to Hugo. I sensed that he was talking about me.

Sure enough: as he drew even with me Hugo stopped, smiled at me, and spoke. "Philip tells me you have to leave the Ashram? Why don't you look for a private accommodation? I can see what is available if you like."

Slightly dumbstruck, I nodded my thanks. He spoke again: "You are a writer I heard? A journalist?" I nodded again. He chuckled.

"You are very young. First you must have something to write about!"

He chuckled again and walked on, followed by the group.

And by me, at a little distance.

This time, I would definitely see where they went.

But I didn't. I reached Skandashram, and, as on the two previous days, it was empty.

The next day was Christmas Day. I still had nowhere to live, though I had been grudgingly granted a short extension of my Ashram stay by the sullen Mr Koppikar. But time was running out. Again, I walked up to Skandashram. I had started to love this walk for its own sake, and always spent up to an hour meditating there once I reached it. But I was still curious as to where the others disappeared to. Today would probably be no different...

But it was. As I walked past the little grove of trees outside the Ashram, someone called out to me: "Hello there!"

I turned to see a very bronzed young man, wearing just a red lungi, approach, holding out a bag.

"Hello," he said again. "I'm Albert. We had a Christmas party last night and we had some fruit left over. Would you like it?"

I gratefully took the bag of fruit, and we chatted for a while. He was

originally German, he said, but had lived for many years in Australia and now had Australian nationality. He now lived in a cave on the Hill below Skandashram. He came up here to meditate every morning.

“Why don’t you join us?” he added. After which he led me into the Ashram, through a small door to the right of the entrance, across a small courtyard, and up a flight of steps to a beautiful platform shaded by the overhanging branches of a spreading mango tree. And there they all were.

We sang a bhajan: Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram, Om. It was the first time I had heard this mantra, and it seemed the sweetest sound in the world. And then Hugo spoke to us.

He spoke with such conviction, such strength, such deep wisdom – I listened as I had never listened before, and every word seemed to resonate in me. He spoke of the inner path, and how to walk it; the inner call, and how to answer it. He spoke of devotion to Bhagavan, and surrender, and how to overcome the pesky little ME that tries to interfere. He spoke so clearly: it was all so simple, so precious; he was simply uncovering truths I felt to have known already, and with so much passion, so much charisma, so much conviction – these were not empty words, not just theory – he knew of what he spoke, had experienced it all, and was simply passing it on to us. I was mesmerised.

That very afternoon, possibly through Hugo’s intervention, I was shown a little hut behind the Ramanashram premises, that was available to rent. It was nothing more than two very tiny rooms; there was no bathroom, no toilet, no running water, and no fence around it. My toilet was literally the open fields beneath the Hill, along with the sadhus and other single men. Probably not the best home for a single young woman, looking back, but I didn’t think of that; it could be mine, I was told, and I moved in immediately. It was known as Brunton’s Cottage, as the writer Paul Brunton, who had drawn many Westerners here with his book *A Search in Secret India*, had built it and lived there for some time during Bhagavan’s lifetime. And yes, it was as primitive as could be, but it had a charm to it, and a history, and I felt privileged beyond belief. It was in Palakottu, a group of huts where, in Bhagavan’s time *sādhu* had lived and done their sadhana. Now I, too, was officially a *sādhu*.

When I look back today, that was the beginning of perhaps the most blessed year of my life. I loved the daily walk to Skandashram, the joy and growing understanding I derived from Hugo's talks, my growing group of friends, the singing we sometimes all did, gathering in the evening at the cottage shared by Jacqueline and Diane at the back of Morvi Guest House, a cottage known as Ramana Shanti. Finally, for the first time in my life, I was with people who truly understood what made me tick, what I yearned for. It was a wonderful few months.

However, hard times were looming – that's what they all said, including Hugo. I had claimed I would stay here forever; they were all bound for Europe at the end of the 'season', which ended in February.

"You will be all alone," they said, "without friends, without company, without activity. The hot season starts after February. It's brutal. Hardly anyone can stand it. But worst is the emptiness you'll be facing. No friends, no company, nothing to do. Day after day, just to confront yourself. Your ego. After a while, all your vasanas come up. That's what happens in this place. You can't imagine the power of your deeply buried unresolved tendencies! They are ugly, and ruthless, and you'll run away from Arunachala. Better to go to a nice soft place in India till next winter when we all return."

But no, I insisted. I would stay, and face whatever came. As for the heat: I am from a country six degrees north of the equator. I don't mind heat. It's cold I can't stand.

So, I bid them all goodbye, and prepared for a long, hot season on my own.

By now I had had some practice in meditation and found it actually came quite easily to me. After all, even as a child I had been introspective, questing, wondering about thoughts and where they came from and what lay behind them; my mind seemed to quite naturally gravitate inwards, to silence. As for those dreaded vasanas – I was eager to meet them, to encounter the very worst of myself, all the shadows lurking beneath the surface of my identity; I felt that they were a thick black wall I had to penetrate in order to truly find my way on this wonderful journey of Self-discovery. I might be just a beginner, but I was eager and ready to face any monsters that might come my way.

And come they did. But I had my tools, and I had the Meditation

Hall, and Bhagavan sitting there, and my photos of him, and the Hill – whose innate power I became more aware of from day to day. I have always loved solitude, and things weren't nearly as bad as my friends had predicted.

And I wasn't as alone as everyone said. I had met quite a few of those old devotees myself. There was Swami Viswanathan, who spoke little but whose doors seemed always open for people to come and simply sit in silence. Roda McIver was a Parsi woman whom I visited at least once a week, eager to hear her stories of Bhagavan. And there was Mrs Osborne, a leading light for me, and her stories were the most rivetting of all.

I also read; books had always been my primary guide; books had led me to this path and would lead me on. I borrowed one book after the other from the library. I read *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and *The Way of a Pilgrim*. I read books on Sufism and, of course, Bhagavan's *Talks* and the *Letters* and the books of Mister Cohen and Major Chadwick and all the other old devotees. With the right books I could never be completely alone.

And once again, a special book fell into my hands. This one was about a female saint who, I read, spent her time moving from place to place in North India; who was highly revered, had even been here, to Ramanasramam, and had declared that He is the Sun and we are the stars.

There was a photo in that book, of an old woman whose eyes held mine, pouring a love into my heart that melted me to my core. And I knew: I had to see her.

I wrote to her Ashram headquarters in Varanasi and was told she would be in Poona in May. I decided that I, too, would be in Poona in May. Was I running away from Arunachala, as had been predicted? Perhaps. But I was running towards a power which was at least as great, a power that would dig up all those terrifying vasanas, only to disarm them; a power that would accompany me for the rest of my life.

Her name was Anandamayi Ma. ▲



# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## The Advent of Namdev

### Chapter One

NABAJI SIDDHA

#### **Glory to Thee O Lord!**

O Lord! Thou deigned to become  
Messenger of peace for the Pandavas;  
Emerging in cosmic form out of a dwarf,  
Thou covered the whole world in one stride!

Though I seek pleasures like a cur,  
And do not crave Thy love precious,  
O causeless Ocean of mercy,  
I take refuge in Thee!

#### **Hymn to Sant Namdev**

O Sant! You are not born of human conception,  
Your heart never swerved from Hari's feet;  
You bewailed, wept and shed hot tears in torrents,  
Until Panduranga accepted a morsel from your hands;  
Out of pure love you gave away all your wealth,  
To the delight of Sadhus and the needy!  
By reviving a calf from the mouth of death,  
You put to shame the sceptics and the Muslim emperor,  
Rare Sant that you are, O Namdev!  
I offer worship to your holy feet.

## Introduction

Our readers may be wondering why the stories of Sants from Mahabhakta Vijayam, being published in the *Mountain Path*, are not complete and some parts of the stories vary from the versions popularly known in different parts of the country.

Firstly, we are not writing the complete story of the Mahatmas, but only those portions which were read out in Bhagavan's presence or browsed by Bhagavan himself or those episodes which were quoted by Bhagavan on different occasions. Most often, the readings or references were from the Tamil version written by Sri Venkatadas, under the title *Mahabhakta Vijayam*.

Secondly, many works have been composed on these Mahabhaktas, the great devotees of the Lord, in different periods of time by various authors like Nabhadass, Uddhavadass, Priyadas, Mahipati, Deepadev and Venkatadas, belonging to different regions and writing in various languages, such as Hindustani, Bhojpuri, Marathi and Tamil. These authors themselves are great Sants of exalted devotion, supreme Knowledge and great erudition and are revered highly. Among these works, some contain only the life stories, some only a skeletal sketch of the Sant's life, dwelling more on his upadesa or teachings, while some narrate both the stories and teachings in detail. Given this background, there is bound to be some difference in their versions.

The following table has been made from information given in *Mahabhakta Vijayam*:

Authors & Titles on Maha-Bhaktas					
Author's Name	Nabhaji	Uddhava	Mahipati	Deepadev	Venkatadas
Title of the Work	Bhaktasaram	Bhaktamala	Bhakta Vijayam Sant Vijayam Lilamritam	Deepa Ratnakaram	Maha Bhakta Vijayam
Language	Hindustani	Gwalior	Marathi	Marathi	Tamil
Type	Life Stories	Life Stories (condensed)	Life Stories & Teachings	Teachings	Life Stories & Teachings
Coverage	790 Sants	700 Sants	1760 Sants	----	----



### **Advent of Namdev**

The great Siddhas who had risen above body-identification, conquered death and taken their vital breath to Brahmarandra, completed their morning oblations and daily practices and reached the abode of the glorious Mahatma, Nabhaji. Prostrating at his holy feet, they uttered the following prayer in humble tones, “O Mahatma! Please be gracious and delight our hearts with the nectar of the life story of Sant Namdev who is verily the incarnation of Sri Uddhava!”

Sant Nabhadhas replied in a jubilant voice, “O eager noble souls! It thrills my heart to hear your request. What better occupation can be there for the mind than dwelling on such a sublime subject! The lips that utter the tales of great Sants and the ears which partake of them with such eagerness are blessed. Let me start the narration without delay.” Thus proceeded Nabhaji on his noble task:

In Pandharpur, the abode of Lord Vittal, the holy city on the banks of Chandrabhaga river and glorified in all quarters of the world, there lived a tailor by the name of Damaseth. His forehead was adorned with religious marks, and his mind, free of blemishes and worldly desires, was filled with auspicious qualities. His heart was dyed in the colour of devotion to God and his lips were ever whispering the Name of the Lord. His mind, bearing no ill-will towards anyone and overflowing with incomparable kindness, remained centred on the feet of Lord Hari. He kept a close vigil on his mind, restraining it from undesirable thoughts and anger. His wife Gunabai was no less virtuous than him and always kept her senses under control. The couple lived the ideal life of householders.

Damaseth had been blessed with wealth, honour and devout relatives whose hearts were anchored in God-remembrance even in their dreams. In the company of such harmonious and dedicated kin, Damaseth would go around the streets singing the names of the Lord with joy. Another practice which he cherished was to unfailingly carry food to the temple of Vittal and to offer it to Him with great affection. He did not fritter away the remaining time of the day on any other occupation than the family tradition of being a tailor. However, there was one sorrow gnawing at the couple’s hearts. Though Damaseth was sixty years of age and Gunabai was fifty years old, they were without any offspring. They grieved that their married life was barren, like the cactus which bears no fruit.

One night, the Lord in the form of a Brahmin appeared in the dream of Gunabai and said, “O virtuous woman, you will beget a child in the morning and become a mother!” Gunabai woke up immediately and sat dazed with a sense of wonder at the content of her dream. Then, waking up her husband she apprised him of her dream and asked innocently, “O Swami, will I really become a mother in the morning as assured by the Brahmin?”

On hearing this, Damaseth’s body shook with laughter and he said in a teasing tone, “O gullible woman! My beloved partner! A woman should bear a child in her womb for nine months. Even so, you are old, past the child-bearing age. It will be strange if you conceive a child at this age. It is your ardent desire for a child that has given rise to a dream of this kind.”

Overcome by shame at his words, Gunabai fell silent. In accordance with her daily practice of going to the temple in the morning, she hurried to the Abode of Lord Panduranga and addressed Him earnestly, “O Lord! I don’t know who appeared in my dream. Whoever he may be, You must come to my rescue and bless me with a child, quench the fire in my heart today.” She sang adorations to the Lord and mentally placed her prayer along with her anguished heart at His lotus feet. Her heart suddenly skipped with joy and she returned home in high spirits.

While Damaseth was on his way to Chandrabhaga river for his morning bath, an old Brahmin accosted him and asked, “O Dama, have you been blessed with a child today?”

Taken aback by his words, Dama thought, “This man must have overheard our conversation about the dream. And he is ridiculing me now for the inappropriate desire that is plaguing our minds even in our old age. I am ashamed even to look at his face!”

As Damaseth tried to hurry away, the Brahmin caught hold of his wrist and started talking loudly, “O devotee of Hari, didn’t you hear me? I know you are old and deaf, and yet your desire for a child hasn’t left you!”

These words humiliated poor Damaseth and made him angry. He tried to prise his wrist away from his grip, retorting, “Why are you making fun of me? Why should I harbour such a desire in my old age? You are unnecessarily picking a quarrel with me. Mind your business. Your unworthy behaviour doesn’t befit your age.”



Without releasing Dama's hand, the Brahmin said, "O Swami! Devotee of the Lord! O cagey fellow! I have just visited your home. Your wife has given birth to a child in her old age. Why does the fact singe you and have you jumping wildly? Come home with me and verify it for yourself and give me generous dakshina. Cherish the child that you have begotten in your old age!"

Utterly mortified, Damaseth shot back furiously, "Why are you blocking my way? Has anyone heard of such a ridiculous thing as an old woman giving birth to a baby? O Brahmin! We hardly know each other, yet you are picking a quarrel with me in the morning and keep on insulting me?"

Clapping both his hands and laughing uproariously, the Brahmin said, "Fie upon you! Don't you recognize me?" He continued in a strident voice, "You come to me daily and stand before me humbly with both palms joined, yet you deny your long friendship with me in public. You are not only deaf, but also blind. Though you are old, deaf and blind, your sense desires have not aged or left you. You are still nursing the desire to sire a child! How ridiculous!"

Damaseth was utterly stupefied. Then, gathering his wits, he said, "Swami! Please be calm. You are a complete stranger to me, yet you talk of my coming to you daily with folded hands! Why do you call me all these names without any provocation? Even if my wife should beget a child at this age, what is it to you? Why should you collect the whole town and disgrace me in front of others? Ah..., I now see your true colours! You are a cunning fellow bent on wresting some alms from me. Since you are ashamed of begging for your alms, you have resorted to the tactic of embarrassing me. Please give up such meanness and go home!"

"O Dama! You are telling me to get lost." The Brahmin continued sarcastically, "Oh...! So it is your petty alms which are filling my belly daily! Your son also will continue this practice and appease my hunger daily!" Then assuming a conciliatory tone, he said, "By the way, what name have you thought of for your child? At the naming ceremony, don't you forget me! Don't invite some other Brahmin by mistake and earn his curse by your disrespectful behaviour." Now, resuming his belligerent tone, the Brahmin concluded with a strange light shining in his eyes, "Watch out! Don't get into a scuffle with

me. There is no point in regretting it later. Beware of incurring the displeasure of a Brahmin.”

Damaseth was very disturbed and puzzled by the unpredictable behaviour of this Brahmin. He wondered, “Why does this Brahmin behave so awfully towards me in the early hours? Isn’t it true that a Brahmin turned into a Brahma-Rakhshas (a ghost due to some sin), is the most terrible to contend with? He must surely be such an entity.” Damaseth’s humiliation smote him and roused great ire in him. He started abusing the Brahmin, calling him all kinds of names.

This set the pace for a new bout of verbal assaults leading to a physical scuffle. The Brahmin lunged at his adversary. Holding Damaseth tightly, he pulled at his tuft of hair and snapped at him, “You lowly fellow who makes out your living by dipping neck-deep into piles of torn, old clothes and stitching them from dawn to dusk! Brainless creature! Instead of worshipping a Brahmin and humbly offering rewards to one who has brought you very auspicious tidings, you are abusing me and preaching me philosophy about being peaceful and, in the same breath, hurling abuses at me! You pretend to take this favourable event as a disgrace, while nursing this secret longing in your heart! Can you swear on Chandrabhaga that you never secretly desired a child? You pretentious, desire-ridden creature!” The Brahmin pulled at Dama’s beard and tuft alternately with even greater force.

Dama was certainly stunned by the antics of this Brahmin and winced at the pain inflicted on his tuft and beard. “O what an unfortunate beginning of the day for me! How cruelly he is exposing me in front of all! If I could get him alone I would not hesitate to even kill him! Alas! It is much past dawn. I have to complete my morning bath and rituals. It will soon be time to take the *naivedyam* (the offering of food) to the Lord. How am I to get away from this fellow?”

Somehow he freed one of his hands for a moment from his assailant’s clutches and broke a thick branch off a nearby tree with the intention of hailing blows on him. However, he was no match for the swiftness of his opponent. Even before the stick touched him, the Brahmin started howling, “O gentle folks! Have you seen how this old man has clubbed me with his stick?” With these words, he launched himself at Dama fiercely, dealing him blows and kicks which descended on him like thunderbolts.

Damaseth fell to the ground and hot tears of pain and humiliation stung his eyes. He then managed to sit up and, applying all his energy, pounced on the Brahmin, pushing him down, pinned him to the ground and hitting him with his fist. He was amazed at his new strength. But soon the crafty old man overcame his opponent. He sprang up with fury and rushed at Dama. Extremely frightened and thinking, “O goodness! He is no Brahmin! He is verily the Lord of Death himself!” Dama fled in terror. However, giving him a chase, the Brahmin caught hold of him and pushed him on to the sandy bank of the river. With a new strength born of desperation, Dama rolled off into the flowing water as a last resort, to escape from the battering. He saw the man running along the bank to try to catch him again. Dama decided that he would rather be swallowed by the current of the water than be caught by such an enemy. He floated along for a mile or so until he felt safe from the Brahmin’s sight and then hurriedly began his morning bath.

Meanwhile, the Lord who, in the form of the Brahmin, had sported with Damaseth, had decided to fulfil the ardent desire of His devotee for a child. He summoned Uddhava, His great devotee, who reached the Lord in a trice from Sri Vaikuntam, extolling His glory. The Lord opened His lotus-like mouth and addressed Uddhava, “O My dear one, do you see that old man afar, taking a dip in the river? He is none other than My dear devotee, Damaseth. He longs for a child and I want you to reach the womb of his aged wife and take birth as their son and spread My glory in this world to nurture devotion for Me and My Name in the hearts of all people.”

Uddhava, in consternation, trembled like a leaf in the storm. He sobbed and said, “O Lord! Even after being blessed with Your full grace, will You throw me in the bottomless hell of Samsara, the endless cycle of birth and death? Is there any hell worse than staying in the womb which signifies lust and desire and infested with blood and foul odour? The miserable condition of the foetus, being confined in a narrow space and hanging upside down in the womb and undergoing deathly pangs at the time of birth, are indescribable. Lord Yama’s punishment is most terrifying when he throws us back in the life of delusion. Isn’t the Lord aware of these things? Is there any place holier than Your eternal realm? After bestowing the blessed state of

liberation, how can You wrest it back? You have shattered my faith in You! The worldly life is verily an endless nightmare.”

Beholding Uddhava's agony, the compassionate Lord enveloped him in His loving embrace and said in a soothing voice, “O beloved one, only devotees like you can spread the true glory of My name. I will be with you always, as your friend and servant.” Sensing Uddhava's bewilderment and his reluctance to enter a human womb, the Lord modified His suggestion and made it acceptable to him with His nectarine appeal.

Comforted and cajoled thus, Uddhava took the form of an infant and entered into a big shell which was drifting on the waters of Chandrabhaga. The cries which the infant set off, mingling with the gurgling of the water, made a nice music, as the shell floated near Damaseth who was taking his series of dips in the river. Though startled at first, reaching forward, he took hold of the shell and lifted the infant out of it, wondering as to how the baby came to be floating in the river. However, holding it close, he reached the shore. Consoling the baby in a crooning voice, he started walking towards his home. Lo! The quarrelsome Brahmin made his appearance out of nowhere and continued his diatribe again, “You hypocrite, how did you come by that child after all your arguments denying any desire for a child? Where are you running now? From where did you get so much strength to run so fast? Is it for fulfillment of this wish that you circumambulated the temple daily? And not out of devotion! What are you going to gain by having a child? Are you going to be liberated from the cycle of Samsara?”

Blocking his way, the Brahmin continued, “O tailor! Whose child is this? What kind of game is this child going to play in your life, I wonder! Let me have a look at the baby!” So saying, he tried to wrest the baby from Damaseth. Dama, by the play of God's illusory power, was suddenly overwhelmed by affection and attachment, and became furious with the old man. However, knowing his prowess, he tried to dodge him saying, “O Swami, you belong to the high caste. I prostrate to you. Don't come running behind me. You will become tired. Don't try to badger me again.”

Alas! there was no escape. The old man, snatching the baby away from Damaseth with lightning speed, asked, “Dama, tell me

from where did you get this child? You are mere straw before me. Therefore, don't try to challenge me. Is it for such a trifle, of getting a child, that you offered delicacies to the Lord in the temple? With such a gross mind, You will never learn the subtle knowledge of liberation! What a rank idiot you are to gratify the Lord with your petty offerings for a petty thing! I am not going to spare you." With these words, he started hailing blows on poor Dama right and left, while clutching the baby. Dama fell at the Brahmin's feet, begging for mercy from his blows. Though he was fuming with rage inside, he pleaded pathetically, "Please give up this violence on me. Come to my house and I will please you with many kinds of gifts." Unheeding these placatory words, the Brahmin remained belligerent and started to claim the child for himself.

Dama was utterly baffled. He made a desperate prayer to his favourite Lord Panduranga, "O dear God! Refuge of the helpless! Consort of Rukmini! You are beyond the Vedas, O playful One! Did I ever approach you for a fortune, like what You bestowed on Sudama, or seek the immortal status of Vibheeshana? Did I ever pray like king Rukmangadha for attaining Your abode for all citizens? Or did I pray for the state of the pole star, like Dhruva? Or did I covet Your divine and delightful company, like Arjuna, who chose You in lieu of Your vast army? Or did I aspire for the privilege of hosting You, like Vidura, or for removal of the sin of Brahmahatya, like Lord Shiva?

"O Lord of Lords! Did I seek protection for my lineage like Prahlada for his clan of Asuras; or ask you for a handsome appearance like Narada? Or did I ever seek Your blessings to defeat the Asuras and protect Indra and the Devas, or for a long life like Muchukunda, or for sensual pleasures like Kubja, or for You to become a babe in my arms like Anusuya? Or did I cry out like Draupadi for endless cloth, or scream like Gajendra to be saved from a crocodile? Or did I seek to enslave You for a few fistfuls of parched rice, like Kuchela? O merciful Lord! While You lifted up Sabari, the tribal woman who gave you wild berries after tasting them, won't You bestow such equal-vision on me also, though I am undeserving? O Paripoorna, Ultimate Perfection, Dispeller of all afflictions, O thousand-named Lord ..."

As Dama was glorifying Him, the heart of the Lord (in the form of the Brahmin) became tender with compassion and filled with the bliss



of love for His devotee. He stood still for a few moments like a painted picture. Seeing the Brahmin motionless, Dama immediately seized the baby from his arms and made a dash for his home. Recovering Himself from His trance-like state, the Lord, disguised as the Brahmin, gave chase again and caught up with Dama at the entrance of his house. Seizing the baby from Dama with a quick movement, he started a volley of abuses, “You are trying to steal my child which I got after many austerities. You decrepit pair! Death is about to claim you. Why do you need a small baby at this stage of your life?”

At this commotion, Gunabai came out of the house and, grasping the situation, spoke to the Brahmin, “O holy Brahmin! The Lord revealed to me in a dream the coming of this child! Why are you being audacious and hanging on to a baby which is rightfully ours?” She ran forward and tried to take the baby from the man.

“O frail woman! Why do you aspire for a baby, when your limbs are so old and wobbly that you won’t even be able to hold the baby in your arms?”

Gunabai retorted vehemently, “O vile man, you who gave up all sense of shame, you who beg for alms to fill your stomach, how dare you abuse us!”

While they were exchanging these hot words, the child started crying. Gunabai became agitated and cried out, “Alas! The little baby is crying for milk. Its body is shivering in the cold. Why are you troubling us and the baby? Don’t earn the curses of a mother!”

This street fight drew the attention of passersby, but on facing the audacious and quarrelsome old Brahmin, they withdrew from the scene. The Lord, knowing that the bad karmas of Gunabai were quickly getting exhausted, dealt a few more blows to Damaseth and a few more vile abuses to his wife, in order to clear their karmic account. Then He started running towards the temple with the child in His arms. On the way, He squeezed the child, who was the incarnation of Uddhava, in His arms, to rid him of his earlier memories of Brahminhood. Then, leaving the child on the ground, He disappeared into the temple.

Gunabai rushed forward and picked up the child. As soon as she held the infant close to her heart, her breasts started secreting milk. Overwhelmed by parental love for the baby, the couple felt that he

## MOUNTAIN PATH

was verily born to them and not just discovered in the river. Bringing the child home, they gave him an auspicious bath in water mixed with propitious ritual offerings and decorated him with silk cloth and jewels. They rejoiced at the generous and handsome fortune that had been bestowed on them by the All-Merciful Lord and celebrated the event by inviting all their relatives for a grand feast. Damaseth gave gifts to all his guests with a generous heart, honoured all the Brahmins and glorified the Lord again and again. They named the child Namdev and fondled him. Forgetting their old age and their frailties, Damaseth and Gunabai started living with great enthusiasm, joyously doting on their child.” ▲

## Ode

Upahar

I see Beloved, standing deep within;  
my joy, my founding grace,  
sowing the patient heart with seeds of light.

Beloved walks, anonymous as space,  
through all the gates of spirit;  
great stillness falls. I am breathed in and out.

I hear Beloved, at the bubbling spring.  
striking an inmost chord,  
singing the soul alive in measured tones.

Beloved fills the world, there is no other;  
self of all self, my rose,  
my absolute. All is forever well.

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

My mind, trusting [in the truth]  
of the Letters Five,<sup>1</sup>  
praised by all those Agamas  
compiled [by the wise],  
of the Lord of Death I'll have no fear  
as astride a sturdy buffalo he appears,  
unlike those who,  
even with a weapon in their hand,  
trembling before their enemy stand.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Five Letters* refers to the five syllable mantra *śi-vā-ya-na-ma*; *śi* represents śivam; *vā* represents his energy of grace – *aruḷ 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*. See the note to verse 15 in the first article in this series.

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

MOUNTAIN PATH

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where stout-trunked elephants  
trumpet loud, as peacocks  
with long and arching tails  
wake from sleep, high in the tops  
of *venkai* trees with scented blossoms  
and fill the air with [plaintive] wails.

(82)

This [foul] body I did not loathe,  
nor lovingly desired  
with holy ash to smear it whole;  
the immaculate, holy Letters Five  
I did not cherish in my mind.  
As I wander thus in confusion lost  
what fate fierce Death holds for me  
I, a hapless wretch, know not.

You who did yourself conceal  
as the Earth's Consumer<sup>2</sup>  
languished, unable to reveal  
the all-pervading ankleted feet  
that by the adoring Patanjali<sup>3</sup>  
in [Tillai's golden] Hall were seen,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(83)

Might it be an easy task  
to guide my mind

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<sup>2</sup> *maṇuṇi* – the *Consumer of the World* is a reference to Kalki, the 10th avatar of Viṣṇu, whose role is to appear mounted on a white horse and wielding a drawn sword to destroy the world at the end of the current *kali yuga* in preparation for the start of a new *satya yuga*.

<sup>3</sup> *aravam* – *snake*, serpent refers to Patañjali, 'A saint, author of the *yōga* sutras, *Mahābhāṣya* and a treatise on medicine in Sanskrit, considered an incarnation of Adīṣeṣa,' (Tam. Lex.). A number of stories tell of Patañjali's desire to witness Śiva's cosmic dance in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram and of how his wish came to be granted. The point here again is that *Sōṇasailan* will remain inaccessible even to the gods if they are devoid of devotion and driven by ego but will make himself easily accessible to true devotees, however humble.

on liberation's path  
 that lies through comely peaks  
 of maidens' ample breasts,  
 across the ocean  
 of their wanton eyes  
 and through the black night  
 of their tresses?

Mountains there are  
 Where at dawn and sunset  
 The ruddy sun may take its rest.<sup>4</sup>  
 This you know full well,  
 so in the fierce heat  
 you tower high  
 to give the midday sun  
 a place to dwell,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(84)

Prizing beads of *rudrasksha*  
 as the only jewels true,  
 smearing my body  
 with the holy ashes white,  
 drawing upon my brow  
 the three-barred Saiva sign,<sup>5</sup>  
 grant in grace that I  
 may perform puja to you.

Above your lofty head  
 where the *Kartikai* beacon  
 shines out like a lotus bright,  
 Ganga's chilly waves are spread

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to the *udayagiri* and the *attagiri*, the mountains in the east and west behind which the sun is supposed to rise and set. The eastern mountain is mentioned previously in v. 4: *udaya tani malai – the matchless Eastern Mount*.

<sup>5</sup> *punḍara kūrī* or simply *punḍaram* are lines or marks on the forehead, worn by religious devotees. That worn by Saivas consists of three horizontal lines and is known as *tiri punḍaram* and that worn by Vaishnavites, consisting of vertical lines in various configurations, is called *ūrttuva punḍaram*.

like a canopy all pearly white,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (85)

When will I be free from those  
 whose tongues do not  
 the Letters Five speak out  
 but other [lesser] mantras [spout],  
 from ignorant fools  
 who to base and mortal men  
 their plaudits raise  
 in all the forms of song,<sup>6</sup>  
 though you are there  
 for them to praise?

You who golden Meru chose  
 to be your flawless bow,<sup>7</sup>  
 and the Dark One who of yore  
 raised up a mountain<sup>8</sup>  
 his herd of cows to shield  
 to be your arrow<sup>9</sup> so decreed,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (86)

<sup>6</sup> *pāviṇam* – classes of verse or more precisely types of verse and their derived sub-classes. The four classes of verse are *veṅpā*, *āciriya-p-pā*, *kaḷi-p-pā* and *vañci-p-pā*, from each of which are derived three types of poem which partake of some of its properties; these are *tuṛai*, *tāḷicai* and *viruttam*. Thus we have *veṅṭuṛai*, *veṅṭāḷicai*, *veḷiviruttam* and so forth.

<sup>7</sup> See v. 19 and note in the first article in this series.

<sup>8</sup> This is a reference to the famous incident in the life of Kṛṣṇa, when, during a dispute with Indra, he lifted up the Govardhana Mountain to protect the animals and people of the region from the devastating flood that Indra poured down. Kṛṣṇa is referred to in the verse simply as *kuṅṛu* – mountain. It has been translated in the verse as the *Dark One* to avoid the repetition of the word mountain.

<sup>9</sup> Kṛṣṇa is an *avatar* of Viṣṇu, whom Śiva employed as his arrow when destroying the aerial cities of the *asuras*. On the same occasion he used Mount Meru as his bow, an incident referred to in v. 19, mentioned in the previous note.

Daylight and dark night,  
 sun, moon, noble soul,  
 five elements perceived<sup>9</sup> –  
 when shall my eyes  
 exult in the sight  
 of your form [supreme]  
 transcending all of these?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 whom flowery tanks surround,  
 where beetles that amidst petals  
 of the lotus blossom sojourn,  
 rise up like clouds of smoke  
 from bright flames of *kungiliyam*  
 that in shining salvers burns.<sup>10</sup>

(87)

May you a single word vouchsafe,  
 so that I, poor wretch, may  
 of pure awareness' form partake,  
 wherein the fivefold elements,  
 sense organs with their senses,  
 and the faculties of mind  
 all subside and go,  
 and so entirely slay my foes,  
 these powerful deeds [that bind].<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The verse begins by listing the *aṭṭa mūrṭti*, Sanskrit *aṣṭa mūrṭti*, the eight forms of Śiva. Their Tamil names are as follows: *būmi* – earth, *nīr* – water, *tēyu* – fire, *vāyu* – air, *ākāyam* – ether, *iyamāṇaṅ* – the sacrificer, the soul, *sūriyaṅ* – the sun, *candiraṅ* – the moon. *iyamāṇaṅ* or *iyamāṅ* Skt. *yajamāna* means sacrificer from the root *yaj* – to sacrifice. In Tamil it has the secondary meaning of life, soul. Śiva is the source of all created things but, as the verse points out, transcends all of them.

<sup>10</sup> The lotus pads on the tanks of the mountain are compared to bright salvers set on stands, which are the stalks of the lotuses. The red flowers are compared to the flames of burning incense and the rising clouds of winged insects that feed on their nectar, to the smoke rising from it. *kungiliyam* is a resinous gum of which there are a number of varieties, presumably used as, or as a base for, incense.

<sup>11</sup> The ego self, the *jīva*, arises through the *pori* – sense organs, *pulaṅ* – senses and the *kāraṇaṅgaḷ* – the mental faculties and the organs of action engaging with the

MOUNTAIN PATH

You shine out  
like a comely tethering post  
where lady Uma daily ties up both  
The elephants of her ample breasts  
And the lion of her midriff svelte,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(88)

Like rubies set in finest gold  
your holy feet,  
unto the virtuous go  
their holy grace to bestow.  
What a wonder then  
that these bright jewels  
should thus be set  
within the iron of my soul!

Unlike other mountains  
that oceans of the world surround,

---

(cont.) world of the *būtam* – *the five elements* to create the illusion of an individual who is the doer, the one responsible for his own actions, in an apparently external world that is other than himself. The result is that the *jīva* becomes trapped in the cycle of cause and effect created by those *aru viṇai* – *deeds which are hard to escape*. Only the grace of the Lord, usually mediated by an enlightened guru like Sri Ramana, can end this vicious cycle of cause and effect and consequent suffering, often by *oru molī* – *a single or unique word*, a simple statement, such as *cummā iru* – *Just be!* The moment this bogus individual turns his attention inward to dwell purely on the simple sense of being, the house of cards, which is the illusive dichotomy of *jīva* and world, dissolves like a dream and he comes to dwell in the attribute-free nature which is *arivu* – *pure consciousness*. *arivu eṇa* = *arivu āgumpādi* – *so that [I] become pure / mere consciousness (jñāna)*. Thus realisation is simply the state of pure being, unobscured by the accretions imposed by the mind and senses:

The consciousness of the Self is the normal state; our present entanglement is the abnormal state. We imagine that we have to develop towards a perfect state – when we are in it now but have covered it with accretions of external things and thoughts. People talk of attaining the super-consciousness. This is wrong. This Self is our normal consciousness; we imagine we have to develop and attain it but we are in it all the time, only our attention is diverted away from it to intellect and objects. *Conscious Immortality*, p.168.



you within yourself, men proclaim,  
 hold the ocean vast of grace  
 that Himavat, the mountain gave.<sup>12</sup>  
*Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(89)

Those feet so hard to know  
 for those of love for you bereft;  
 those feet that from tall Mal's heart  
 have never [for an instant] left;  
 those feet that rise and fall  
 in blazing light of Tillai's Hall,  
 may they dance their dance  
 within my thoughts.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where hives built by honey bees  
 that burrow into blooms  
 in lofty crowns of tall bamboo  
 are like the fans of palm tree leaves<sup>13</sup>  
 borne by gatherings of devotees.

(90)

Everywhere grow grasses  
 green and fresh  
 and clear waters flow,  
 and in all those places,  
 when you're adored,  
 you come in love  
 your presence to afford.  
 Yet still does mankind

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<sup>12</sup>After the self-immolation of his first consort, Satī, Śiva took as his second wife Parvatī, who was the daughter of Himavat, the personification of the Himalaya mountain range.

<sup>13</sup>*āla vattam* is a 'Circular fan made of cloths, fragrant roots or palm leaves, carried in procession before idols and great persons.' (Tam. Lex.) The poet imagines that the hives attached to the tops of long bamboo stems resemble circular fans on the ends of their long hafts.

MOUNTAIN PATH

vainly toil  
[dying and] being [re]born.

The term ‘Mountain of Compassion’  
is commonly but a metaphor,  
[by devotees] employed,  
but you this definition to avoid  
as an actual ‘Mountain of Compassion’<sup>14</sup>  
[on earth] abiding, skyward soar.  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

(91)

Grant in grace to me  
that with pure jnana’s eye  
I may truly see,  
so that I may meet and remain  
in the company of those  
who do false birth disdain,  
and freed from gross desire  
have for your holy form  
true love attained.

You who rising high,  
tower up like a column tall,  
so that other mountains  
over whose lofty peaks  
the skyborne moon doth crawl  
seem nothing more  
than tiny wisps of straw,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

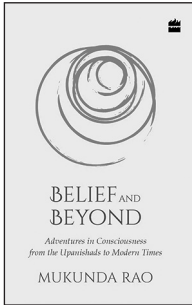
(92)



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<sup>14</sup> *metaphor* translates the words *aṅ-moḷi-t-togai* literally *a compound with a missing word*. As for example *porroṭi (poṅ toṭi) – [a lady with] golden bangles*. Thus taken as such a compound *karuṇai malai* would refer to *the Lord as [One who possesses or is like] a mountain of compassion*. However taken as a simple *vērrumai-t-togai* compound with omission of the case ending, the meaning is simply *mountain of compassion*, meaning it is the mountain itself which possesses the compassion, without the epithet being transferred to Lord Śiva.

# BOOK REVIEWS



**BELIEF AND BEYOND** Adventures in Consciousness from the Upanishads to Modern Times by Mukunda Rao. Pub: HarperCollins Publishers India, A-75, Sector 57, Noida, U.P. 201301. 2019. Pp. xviii+300. Rs. 499. ISBN 978-93-5302-8473. [www.harpercollins.co.in](http://www.harpercollins.co.in)

It is reassuring that Mukunda Rao (Rao), the author of this very enjoyable and instructive work on Indian spirituality with emphasis on jñana or enlightenment, who is an ardent admirer and able interpreter of the teaching or non-teaching of the maveric philosopher U.G. Krishnamurti (UG), deemed the most subversive among the thinkers or non-thinkers of our times negating everything that is and is not, past and present, continues to swear by UG (who swore at least at quite a few teachers), with all his rich gifts intact: his keen intellect, his excellent command of English which UG also had, his love of books, his vast reading of philosophical and similar books, authorship of number of highly readable books of different genres, his never-diminishing admiration for and excellent insights on the lives and teachings of Indian saints and sages and ancient and spiritual texts and, above all, a steady home and hearth. UG can be non-subversive too!

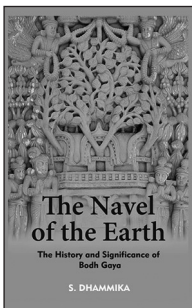
Rao begins at the beginning with the beginning of creation speculated on in the Hymn of Creation in Rg Veda giving us a 'taste of the impenetrable mystery of life'. Rao concludes his rapid but attentive survey of the Vedas and Upanishads remarking that they are rather profound beginnings than final answers. This may be accepted with the caveat that the four Mahavakyas have a ring of finality and timelessness in them.

Rao, who had himself had his share and kind of a death experience and has been a life-long experience seeker of Truth and has had the benefit of association with UG, a no-holds-barred fighter against illusion, has given a very fair and perceptive synopsis of the lives and teachings of saints and sages of India from the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Gaudapada, Adi Sankara, Kabir and others to J. Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi and UG. He refers to the spiritual maverics like

Kabir, Laleshwari of Kashmir, Akka Mahadevi and Allama Prabhu of Karnataka and to the physical mutations gone through by The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram leading her to proclaim that salvation is purely physical. He knows that J. Krishnamurti and Ramana Maharshi were original and the striking similarities between Ma Anandamoyee and Sri Ramana, especially in their freedom from body and mind.

Rao naturally reserves the largest space for UG who to him is incomparable. This attitude is understandable and true of all disciples, followers, adherents, associates, admirers and so on because the guru, teacher, the icon, the mentor is not a person but pure non-dual consciousness. There is only one Guru. The natural state or Sahaja sthiti could have been reached by mutations in the body or by transcending the pancha kosas, the five sheaths enshrouding the Self, one's own true identity. Ramana who was uninterruptedly in the non-dual natural state till the end for fifty-four years after his death experience at Madurai did not hold that kind of death experience as the singular litmus for Self-realisation. By practicing the Self-enquiry taught by him, people had got it instantly, in a matter of days, weeks or months or over the years and got his approval. Ramana never referred to anyone as unrealized for to him there is nothing outside Pure Consciousness. In the Heart, it's Seat, he said everything, the universe and all, comes to an end for the dream is over. Body is just a thought which is a shadow.

This book is another lovely feather in Rao's scholarly cap. —  
Jijñasu



THE NAVEL OF THE EARTH The History and Significance of Bodh Gaya. Y. S. Dhammika. Buddhist Publication Society Inc. PO Box 61, 54 Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Revised edition 2018. pp.138, Price not stated. ISBN: 978-955-2-033-7 Email: [bps@bps.lk](mailto:bps@bps.lk) [www.bps.lk](http://www.bps.lk)

The most important Buddhist shrine in the world is at Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India. It is here that the Buddha received enlightenment over 2,000 years ago, the result of which was the creation of a new 'religion' estimated to be practiced by some nearly 500 million people globally. The Buddha advised his disciples that there are four places which would engender

faith if visited. They were Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. These are his place of birth, the place where he sat on the ‘diamond throne’ and attained enlightenment, the first place where he preached the four noble truths and the place where he left his body and this world. The Vajirasana (diamond throne) at Bodh Gaya is also called the ‘Victory Throne of all The Buddhas’ or the ‘Navel of the Earth’. It is believed that when the universe is dissolved it will be the last place to be destroyed and that it will be the first place to form when the universe begins to re-emerge. Through the centuries the site was widely known as Mahabodhi or ‘great enlightenment’. Pilgrims in ancient times came from as far away as Samarkand, Bactria, Tibet Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Java, Burma, Vietnam, China and Korea. The only known early Japanese pilgrim died somewhere in Malaya in 866 AD.

The author gives a glimpse of the considerable hazards the pilgrims faced on their journey and the ways in which they survived the vicissitudes of pirates, bandits, hunger and the, at times, harsh climate and landscape. Many died in the attempt.

After delivering his sermon at Sarnath, the Buddha did return once more to Bodh Gaya but after that he never again saw the place. Bodh Gaya was relatively unimportant until the advent of Asoka Maurya (304 BCE- 232 BCE), emperor of all of India. He made a pilgrimage there, built a temple and had a branch of the Bodhi Tree sent to Sri Lanka to be planted there. In the early fourth century a monastery was established at Bodh Gaya which had a continuous and strong influence for close to a thousand years. In one text it is mentioned that in 104 BCE a monk led a delegation from the Bodhimanda monastery to Sri Lanka to participate in the opening ceremony of the great stupa at Anuradhapura. When the present day Mahabodhi Temple was built is open to debate and the date ranges from the second to the tenth century CE. It contained a magnificent statue of the Buddha. After the thirteenth century Bodh Gaya was abandoned, and its temples and shrines fell into ruin. In 1877 a mission from the Burmese king came to restore the Mahabodhi Temple. Towards the end of the nineteenth century pilgrims once again returned to Bodh Gaya. Today it is the hub of a massive pilgrimage network.

For those interested in Buddhism or those who are Buddhists, this is a wonderfully informative book, written in a clear, pleasing style that carries its scholarship lightly. — T. V. Ramamurthy ▲

# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## 140th Jayanti Celebration

On Saturday, 11th January, devotees gathered at Bhagavan's Shrine to celebrate Bhagavan's 140th *Jayanti*. The day began with *Mārghazhi pūjā* followed by Tamil *pārāyana*, *kalasa abhishekam* and *Jayanti pūjā*. This year's decorations were extensive as devotees spent the night before decorating the Samadhi Hall. Various music programmes took place on Jayanti night and the night preceding.

## Sri Muruganar

It is rare in the history of Tamil literature that some 25,000 verses to the Guru composed were composed by one poet. The entire corpus was recited for the first time from 21st-30th January at Sri Muruganar's Samadhi Shrine in the Ashram compound. The programme was led by Sri Vilvam Vasudeva Sarma of Mylapore and organised by Choolaimedu Ramanan. There were nine hours of recitation from 7-11 am and 3-8 pm each day.

## Sivaratri

Sivaratri this year was on the 21st February. Lord Siva has stated that "The 14th night of the new moon, in the dark fortnight during the month of Phalguni, is my most favourite day. It is known as Sivaratri." Devotees stayed awake all night. It is said that even unintentional casual worship of Siva on this day bears immense fruit. At the Ashram the shrines were open all night and six *kaala pujas* were performed. During the night many including people from outside Tiruvannamalai did *giri pradakshina* on this auspicious occasion.

## Obituaries

**Marleen Boers** left this world on the 19th December 2019 two weeks after she had decided that her physically ailing body could no longer sustain her one-pointed *sadhana*. She was born in Utrecht The Netherlands, on 10th October 1931. She first learned of Bhagavan through a book her mother had, Heinrich Zimmer's *The Way to the Self*. This together with an unusual spiritual experience at the time paved the way for her to come to India and ultimately, to Tiruvannamalai. See her article in the July 2008 *Mountain Path*.

When she subsequently came across Arthur Osborne's books on Bhagavan, she knew Bhagavan was her guru. She made her first

trip to the Ashram in November 1968 while a member of the Dutch diplomatic corps at Washington DC and came a second time in December 1970 while at the Dutch Consulate in Karachi where she was deliberately posted. In 1972, with the help of Lucia Osborne, Marleen took steps to purchase a small piece of land near the Ashram. Bhagavan's grace aided her in fulfilling her dream to settle near Sri Ramanasramam. Marleen was transferred to the Dutch Consulate in Bombay in 1974.

While in Bombay, she met another Ramana devotee, Maurice Frydman, who took her to see Nisargadatta Maharaj. Maharaj asked her, "Who is your guru?", at which she pointed to Bhagavan's picture hanging just behind him. Maharaj nodded approvingly.

During her four years stationed in Mumbai, she also had the darshan of Ma Anandamayi and Mother Krishnabai.

Marleen resigned her job in December 1978 and came to live permanently in Tiruvannamalai. Through all the vicissitudes she suffered from a Russell's viper snake bite, to cancer to irritable bowel syndrome, arthritis and osteoporosis, she bravely faced all difficulties with a smile. Her spirit was indomitable. Being a staunch 'naturalist' she actively supported wild life preservation. At her deeply moving cremation one could see how many were inspired by her friendship and example.

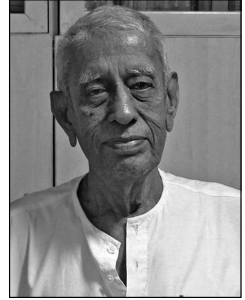


**Smt Nagu** passed away peacefully on 24th January 2020 in Mumbai and was cremated next day. She was the granddaughter of Griddalur Sambasiva Rao, an advocate from Nellore, who was one of the main persons instrumental in getting the WILL made and registered. In fact, he had the rare privilege of signing the WILL as Ramana Maharshi. During Bhagavan's time and, more so, after he was of great help in stabilising

Ashram management. He was blessed with a granddaughter Nagu through his only son. Nagu has been a regular visitor to Ashram from childhood. She and her late husband Sriramulu took keen interest in conducting Ramana Satsang in western suburbs of Mumbai. On the

cremation day, the ashram lit Moksha Deepam at Bhagavan's shrine in the evening. She is survived by a son and 3 daughters.

**Sri V. S. Srinivasan** hailed from Valadi, a small village in Lalgudi Taluk, Tiruchirapalli District. Having lost his parents during his school days, he was reared by his elder brother, a secondary school teacher. After completing SSLC under the guidance of his brother, Srinivasan got married and took employment in Binny Co. Subsequently, he went to Kolkata for work and remained there for some years. His service took him later to Andhra Pradesh and Bangalore. Finally, some 30 years back he took refuge in Sri Ramanasramam and remained for about 17 years where he found peace of mind, working as one of the Ashram accountants. During his retirement he has been living with his sons in Chennai. Born 10th May 1924, V. S. Srinivasan turned 96 last year. Soft-spoken, honest and interested only in leading a simple life with noble intentions, Srinivasan breathed his last on *pradosham* evening, Monday 23rd December 2019 after listening to *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* recited by family members at his bedside. He is survived by a daughter and three sons.



**Sri V.V. Ramana Rao** was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and a popular speaker at Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad. His speeches on Bhagavan's life and teachings were deeply insightful and inspiring.



Sitting in the first floor terrace of his home in Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh, as a 7 year old boy, on the night of April 14th, 1950, he was blessed to see the meteor and its splendour that appeared during Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. Later Bhagavan appeared in his dream and guided him in his career – truly a blessed soul.

He was regularly visiting Ramanasramam from last 4 decades. He merged in Arunachala during early hours of 18th, January, 2020 at Hyderabad. He is survived by his wife and two sons. He was 77. ▲